

**Childhoods revisited: a study of narrative and identity in
selected autobiographic graphic narratives**

by
Catherine Clarke

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Supervisor: Karlien de Villiers



DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature_____ Date_____

ABSTRACT

This study examines the manner in which creating autobiographic narratives can facilitate identity construction and deeper self-understanding. It approaches autobiography as a means of therapy and suggests that the assimilation, acceptance and reworking of one's history – which speaking and writing about their past experiences offers individuals – can be therapeutic. This is an especially important concept in post-traditional societies, which frequently require that individuals draw their own plans and solutions in the face of significant personal transitions or shifts.

Central to this study is the idea that the self is constituted in childhood: that childhood experiences influence the self in assuming a specific structure later in life, and that relationships with family members developed during childhood can impact either favourably or unfavourably on this outcome. Family restructuring as a by-product of marital dissolution as well as the distress divorce can cause children, are explored through visual narratives. Moreover, as a particular type of visual narrative, selected autobiographic comic strips are analysed according to their potential to reflect this childhood condition. In addition, use and the effect of narrative and the potential for these narratives to reveal identity issues and uncertainties is also considered.

Of significance to the study is the intrinsic connection between narrative and identity, and narrative identity is propounded as the product of this relationship. Narrative is asserted as being not only an appropriate form for the expression of identity, but a constituent of and condition for its construction too.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die wyse waarvolgens die skep van outobiografiese vertellings identiteitskonstruksie en deegliker selfbegrip kan bevorder. Dit benader outobiografie as 'n wyse van terapie en stel voor dat die assimilering, aanvaarding en herverwerking van mens se geskiedenis – wat vertelling van en skryf oor hul lewenservaringe aan die individu bied – terapie mag wees. Dit is 'n besonder belangrike konsep in post-tradisionele gemeenskappe waar dit dikwels van individue verwag word om hul eie planne te beraam en oplossings te vind te midde van beduidende persoonlike oorgang of verandering.

Hierdie studie gaan uit van die standpunt dat die self tydens die kinderjare gegrond word: dat ervarings tydens die kinderjare die self beïnvloed om in die latere lewe spesifieke strukture aan te neem, en dat verhoudings met gesinslede wat tydens die kinderjare ontwikkel het, die resultaat gunstig of ongunstig mag beïnvloed. Gesinsherstrukturering as 'n neweproduk van huweliksontbinding gepaardgaande met die spanning wat egskeiding by kinders kan veroorsaak, word ondersoek deur middel van visuele vertellings. Verder, as 'n spesifieke tipe van visuele vertelling, word uitgesoekte outobiografiese tekenstories ge-analiseer volgens hul potensiaal om hierdie toestand tydens die kinderjare te reflekteer. Die mate waartoe die gebruik en effek van vertelling, en die potensiaal van hierdie vertellings om aspekte van identiteit asook onsekerhede te ontbloot, word ook ondersoek.

Van belang by hierdie studie is die intrinsieke verbinding wat bestaan tussen vertelling en identiteit, en dat die vertellingsidentiteit voorgehou word as 'n produk van hierdie verhouding. Vertelling word voorgehou as synde nie net 'n toepaslike vorm vir die uitdrukking van identiteit te wees nie maar dat dit ook 'n deel van, en voorwaarde vir, sy konstruksie is.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Identity, narrative and the self

One's identity is inextricably connected to narrative. That is to say, an individual constructs his or her identity through the process of narrative, and concurrently expresses that identity through narrative. Eakin (1999:101) states that the self is "defined by and transacted in [the] narrative process" and suggests that in this identity-narrative equation, narrative is less "about" the self and more a "constituent of" the self. Narrative can thus be seen as forming part of one's identity and as necessary for its construction, but also as being a reflection of it. The fact that we reflect our identities through our narratives, often unwittingly, underlies many of the discussions in this study. Steinberg (2004:146) illustrates this position well in a paragraph from his biography *The number: one man's search for identity in the Cape underworld and prison gangs*:

When Magadien describes the scenes, you can make out the complex strands of his identity; the activist, celebrating the memory of white retreat, the haunted soul remembering the fallen figures who were once merged into a crowd, and the gangster who watched with glee as the world was turned upside down.

As human beings, rather than animals or objects, we possess the capacity for self-reflexivity; Giddens (1991:52) asserts that the identity of the self "in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, [and] presumes reflexive awareness". Furthermore, this self-identity "is what the individual is conscious 'of' in the term 'self-consciousness'". In other words, self-identity is not something that simply exists, but is created, recreated and sustained through the individual's reflexive thoughts and actions. In addition, Giddens (1991:53) stresses that self-identity is not a trait or collection of traits that an individual might possess, but "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography". To be a person, rather than an animal, or an inanimate object, is to comprehend the concept of what a 'person' is, when applied to both self and others. The concept of reflexive personhood might vary across cultures, but there are elements that are common to all cultures. Characteristic of every known culture is the faculty to employ 'I' within different

contexts. While it “unfolds in culturally specific ways”, narrative is a universal and forcible tool (Lee, Rosenfeld, Mendenhall, Rivers & Tynes 2004:39).

Eakin (1999, 2004) argues that several kinds of selfhood make up the self, the most important of these being the extended self, which is regarded as identity’s signature. Extended selfhood is the self of memory and anticipation, extending over time. The temporal dimension of the extended self lends itself to expression in narrative form, and narrative enables us to establish ourselves as normal individuals for our audience by constructing and performing our stories. Memory and narrative are “identity’s twin supporting structures” (Eakin 2004:121).

Personal narratives we create and express facilitate the construction of meaningful identities, while also enabling us to make sense of our experiences by satisfying our need for unity and wholeness (Woodward 2002:45). Freeman (1993:21) proposes that making sense of others in addition to our self “is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself”. Logic tells us that the beginnings and middles of stories decide their endings. But one could also argue that the ending determines a story’s middle and beginning, for only once a narrative – or experience for that matter – has ended, is it possible to recognize the meaning and significance of what came before, and led to, its end (Freeman 2004:65). Simply put, life is lived forwards, but made sense of and understood backwards.

Magnussen (2000: 197) asserts that according to narrative theory “the term ‘narrative’ covers the story as such, as well as the narrator’s identity and position”. Eakin (1999:100) argues that narrative and identity, when referring to autobiographic narratives, are so intimately linked that “each constantly and properly gravitates into the conceptual field of the other”. According to Eakin (1999:101), the writing of autobiography is an integral part of the lifelong process of identity formation. Writing about the self “serves to bind together more closely the world we live in and the world we study” (Freeman 2004:73). Constructing an autobiographic narrative – whether done so within the domain of psychotherapy or counselling, or retold in the form of a journal or autobiography – requires one to examine past events and experiences, utilize retrospective thinking and invariably look back, sometimes as far as early childhood. The retelling of stories about the past often enables the author to come to

terms with difficult or traumatic phases of childhood (Giddens 1991:72). Although autobiography is most often considered from within the sphere of literature and literary criticism, its capacity to implement identity construction and to heal makes it equally important to psychology, sociology and other human sciences¹ (Brockmeier 2001:263).

1.2 Aims and method

This study examines the manner in which creating autobiographic narratives can facilitate identity construction and deeper self-understanding. It addresses the therapeutic quality of narrative – that is, the potential for self-healing which speaking or writing about past experiences offers an individual – and investigates this phenomenon in graphic narratives. Moreover, as a particular kind of graphic narrative, comic strips in which the artist's childhood is explored are considered and discussed, with special focus on the consequences divorce effects on childhood.

There seems unquestionably to exist a link between childhood experiences and adult traits, fears and prejudices (Noonan 1991:13). Many traditional theories of personality deem childhood the most important period within which changes and developments occur; Freudian psychoanalytic theory assumes that who we become as adults is largely determined by our early childhood experiences (Laubscher & Klinger 1997:60). When adulthood is seen as a consequence of childhood, retelling stories of childhood and examining relationships with family members helps to understand any conflicts within oneself (Woodward 2002:34). The implication that adult identities result from an understanding of childhood experiences – especially where narrative is used to achieve such understanding – is particularly important to this study.

Children are subject to a variety of pressures whilst growing up, but the additional distress which divorce can bring to childhood is explored in this study. The process of divorce might not be as damaging to children as, say, living in a war zone or enduring abuse and neglect, but it undoubtedly causes children a number of intense and

¹ While aspects of both sociological and psychological theory inform the discussions in this study, its parameters do not allow for a comprehensive examination of these aspects or their respective field.

prolonged stressors (Emery 1999a:35). It invariably induces change² and this requires children to adapt. In fact, divorce often causes children more long-term suffering than death, as Herbert (1996:11) asserts:

The loss of a parent through a marital separation is much more likely to cause long-term problems than a loss through death. This may be because of the unpleasant events that often precede the break-up or because the child experiences a feeling of betrayal, of some intentional abandonment.

Loss and absence are at the core of children's experience of separation and divorce. As Smart, Neale and Wade (2001:69) point out, "being with one parent involves them in being apart from the other". Aside from the negative impact loss can have on children, parental divorce during childhood is also known to cause emotional difficulty during adult life. A number of unwanted outcomes in late adolescence and early adult life, including "delinquency, an increased risk for school dropout, lower educational attainment, nonmarital pregnancy, early marriage and one's own divorce" are associated with divorce (Emery 1999a:50).

Despite the negative implications of divorce, it is often the more positive outcome. Herbert (1996:18) suggests that while every child would prefer to live with two happy parents, if parents cannot live together peacefully they do their children no service by staying together for their sake. Similarly, if parents handle the process of divorce responsibly, any negative effects of the separation on their children can be kept to a minimum:

When parents are able to bring their marital relationship to an end without excessive conflict, without putting the children in the middle of whatever conflicts exist, and with a commitment to cooperate on issues of the children's material, physical, educational and emotional welfare, children seem to fare reasonably well in divorce (Lowery 1989:227).

It has been argued that divorce can promote positive development for some children, such as a greater sense of personal responsibility and self-esteem (Emery 1999a, 1999b). Due to increased family demands and a change in the family's structure,

² Divorce brings with it a multitude of disruptions that put children at risk for a change in school or day care, a change in peer group, a decrease in financial resources, and the restructuring of immediate and extended family relationships (Lowery 1989:226).

children of divorced parents may have to assume responsibilities at an earlier age than their peers:

Divorce confronts children with experiences which make them think differently about their family practices and re-evaluate their relationships. This process gives them the opportunity to take an active, independent stance and to experience themselves as autonomous persons (Smart et al 2001:82).

It is important to point out that this study is concerned with the process of divorce as it occurs in contemporary western society³ and the impact of divorce on children is approached entirely from such a perspective. At another point in time or in another culture, circumstances of divorce might differ and so result in different psychological outcomes for children. Of course, this can also be true for children of the same culture, as Emery (1999a:7) explains: “Marital dissolution does not result in the same life changes for children in different cultures, nor does it result in the same life changes for different children within the same culture”.

Divorce and its effect on childhood; adult identity viewed as a consequence of childhood; and the potential for autobiographic narrative to be therapeutic, are topics discussed in this study and explored through the analyses of selected autobiographic visual narratives. Visual narratives can be found in everyday life within various contexts, but this study concentrates on the comic strip as a distinct variety of visual narrative. A visual narrative is understood to be a deliberate and pictorial sequence of events (McCloud 1993:5). While the comic strip meets these conditions, at least some of its images need to be drawn, and it often – but not always – includes text and frequently depicts some sort of unity or meaning (Magnussen 200:199). Comic strips also make use of special visual elements such as speech balloons and thought bubbles, action lines and the use of words as images, which lend them their unique ‘comic’ feel.

The work of three international comic artists, namely David B, Marjane Satrapi and Lynda Barry, is discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3.2, while my own work is

³ Giddens (1991) refers to contemporary western life as a post-traditional order of modernity in which individuals, on various levels and on a daily basis, are able to make choices about how to live their lives.

analysed in Chapter Four. As examples of the autobiographic comic strips selected for discussion in Chapter Three, figures one to three show each artist's depiction of him- or herself as a child. Figure four shows a panel from my own comic strip, *My mother's shoes*, which revolves around the semi-autobiographic character Delilah Golden and who features in all three comic strips analysed in Chapter Four.

The comic strips selected for discussion in this study all highlight a specific childhood condition. David B's *Epileptic* (2005) looks at a childhood haunted by epilepsy; Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003) is set against the backdrop of Iran's Islamic revolution and *Persepolis 2* (2004) within a fundamentalist Iran; Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons* (2002) explores growing up with an angry, unloving mother, while my own comics show how Delilah Golden and her sister fare in the aftermath of their parents' divorce. The comic strips selected for this study are poignant representations of childhood and are all examples of autobiographic graphic narratives demonstrating sensitive and considered juxtaposition of image and text. They are considered and discussed in terms of their use and the effect of their narrative, the potential for these narratives to reveal identity issues and troubles, and how the outcome serves to reinforce each artist's sense of self.

1.3 Overview of chapters

In an effort to understand the relationship between identity and narrative, Chapter 2 looks at each in relation to the self, and relevant theoretical approaches to both are briefly discussed. Section 2.1 approaches identity as a social construct and attempts to summarise the basic factors contributing to the sociological concept of the 'constructed' self, looking specifically at the idea of a relational self located within the parameters of embodiment, as posited by Woodward (2002). The pragmatists W James, GH Mead and CH Cooley's notion of an 'inner' and 'outer' self and their early contribution to the understanding of selfhood – their 'empirical' self – is briefly discussed. Under this section the impact of structuralist dualisms on naming and identification is considered and the connection between systems of representation and identity construction is also established.



Figure 1: David B, *Epileptic*, 2006 (David B 2006:75)



Figure 2: Lynda Barry, *One Hundred*, 2002 (Barry 2002:48)



Figure 3: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2006 (Clarke 2006:4)



Figure 4: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 2003 (Satrapi 2003:33)

Section 2.2 and 2.3 focus on narrative and the self. Under 2.2 Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity and the notion that life informs, and is informed by stories, are explored; while it is argued in section 2.3 that there exist strong parallels between the effect of autobiography (or autobiographic thinking) and psychotherapy on an individual, and the potential for self-healing through telling and retelling narratives of the past is examined. Autobiographic narratives are considered more thoroughly in Chapter 3, where Freeman's (2004:77) view of autobiography as "refiguring the past and in turn reconfiguring the self" is positioned with the similar thinking of Woodward (2002), Brockmeier (2001), Whitebrook (2001) and Laubscher & Klinger (1997), among others. The view that memory can be hazy and unreliable, and thus any "retrospective reconstruction" (Brockmeier 2001:270) requires a degree of imagination or fiction where memory falls short, is presented under section 3.1. Elbaz (1987) and Freeman (1993) further this view, agreeing that truth and meaning in autobiographical texts are as much found as they are created. The significance of temporality to narrative is addressed and autobiography is described as the site where the past, present and future merge (Brockmeier 2001; Freeman 1993).

Section 3.2 briefly examines childhood and how this familiar phase of life is often reflected in autobiographical texts. The idea that who we become as adults is determined by our experiences in childhood is examined further; it is also reasoned that a child's family is its chief "socializer" (Rose & Rose 1969:205), and that relationships with family members play an influential role in shaping identity later in life. Effects of divorce on children and their relationships with family members, is briefly considered. The opinion that although narrative may be a universal means of identity construction, one's personal narrative is developed through childhood by contact with family and exposure to a specific culture (or cultures), is also asserted.

Under section 3.3 autobiographic graphic narratives (or graphic novels) are discussed as a veritable form of autobiography. Spiegelman's award-winning *Maus* is introduced as a graphic novel and as an example of autobiography. Section 3.3.1 explains comic strips and graphic narratives as a specific type of visual narrative and looks at the history of graphic novels in more detail. The view that graphic novels are in many ways comparable to conventional novels, and should therefore be considered as literary, is put forward. Under section 3.3.2 the comics of David B, Marjane Satrapi

and Lynda Barry in *Epileptic*, *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*, and *One Hundred Demons*, are discussed. Each of these graphic novels explores the trials of a childhood affected by unique circumstances and the manner in which each artist has overcome, or come to terms with, these circumstances.

Chapter Four examines three comic strips forming part of my post-graduate study of graphic narratives. They are *My mother's shoes* (2005), *Growing up Golden* (2006), and *A mother always knows...* (2006). Each narrative examines aspects of the aftermath of divorce and its effect on children, while also showing that individual identity is tied to family identity and that children's sense of identity and self is challenged by family restructuring. The visual analyses follow an explanation of Delilah Golden and how her character came to be.

Chapter Five concludes this study with a brief summary of each chapter's content; where after suggestions of areas for future research are made. The study concludes with a discussion on the importance of self-reflexivity and autobiographical thinking to sustaining an integrated sense of self in modern, contemporary life.

2. IDENTITY AND NARRATIVE

Chapter Two briefly explores the relationship between narrative, identity and the self. Section 2.1 looks at identity in relation to the self, the body and the social. An inner, subjective 'I' is contrasted against an outer, social 'me' as the two selves that constitute, as well as reflect identity. The significance of language to naming and classification, and consequently to identity construction, is also considered. Section 2.2 is devoted to that type of identity acquired through the mediation of narrative, namely narrative identity. The notion that stories and life are inseparable phenomena is addressed, and it is suggested that narrative identity depends on this connection for its construction, acquisition and understanding. Under section 2.3 the parallels between autobiographic narratives, or autobiographical thinking, and psychotherapy are drawn. Both autobiography and psychotherapy involve a process of self-interpretation which necessarily means looking back in order to move forward. It is proposed that present identities are constructed in either of these capacities, through telling and retelling the story of the past. Autobiography is discussed further in Chapter Three.

2.1. Identity and selfhood: a sociological perspective

The term identity came into popular usage in the 20th century despite its long history, and derives from the Latin word *idem*, implying sameness and continuity (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). One's identity is frequently referred to as selfhood; according to Woodward (2002:5) "there is clearly an overlap between the terms self, subject and identity". The choice of term indicates the degree of agency it is possible to exercise. According to Descartes' Cartesian subject, the self is a distinctively human capacity, which enables people to reflect on their nature and the social world through communication and language (Marshall and Scott 2005:288). The Cartesian subject is "one who is conscious of bodily states through a consciousness that is clearly demarcated from the body of which it is conscious" (Woodward 2002:6). Tallis (2004:231) asserts that a self needs to be conscious, thinking and in possession of mental content: "the self has to have substantiality, specificity, content, in order to

become an object of consciousness; without substantiality, the inner gaze of self-consciousness would pass straight through”.

The word ‘person’ is commonly applied to mean self⁴ as is evidenced by Noonan’s (1991:19) statement: “persons are separately existing entities, distinct from their brains, bodies and experiences”. Harré (2004:60) suggests that while ‘person’ is univocal, stable and “serves as the word for the basic particulars of the human world”, ‘self’ is multivocal and has “a wide variety of diverse uses”. While the word person is more often associated with an outward bodily form, ‘the self’ is used to describe the inner, psychological dimension of a being (Honderich 2005:860). Whereas persons can be seen, a self cannot, as Freeman (1993:8) stresses: “[the self] is not a *thing*; it is not a substance, a material entity that we can somehow grab hold of and place before our very eyes”.

Sociological views of identity tend to challenge essentialist understandings, upholding that identity is invented and constructed, rather than it having a unique or core essence and remaining the same throughout life (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). Woodward (2002:1) states that while the ‘constructed’ subject exercises individual agency (“human beings are able to shape their own identities, make choices and take responsibility”), who and what people become is also determined by other factors, including economic, social, cultural and political, beyond their control.

For Woodward (2002:16), identity is relational; it is those relationships between the personal and the social and the self and others that determine one’s identity: “Identity occupies the interface between the psychic and the social, the personal and the social”. If identity connects the personal and the social, it is most frequently constructed through social interaction and is therefore socially located (Woodward *ibid*). Gergen (1971:40) agrees: “Social interaction does much to furnish the basic repertoire of concepts used by the person to understand himself and to guide his conduct”.

⁴ For the purpose of this study ‘the self’ is understood in the Cartesian sense, as that entity which is intangible and has the capacity for self-consciousness, first-person thought and the possession of first-person knowledge (Honderich 2005:860). Oneself as a physical and tangible being is recognized as distinct from the invisible entity that is one’s self.

It follows that the body is what connects the social to the personal and the self – our bodies link the inner and outer aspects of our identity, as Woodward (2002:2) asserts: “Notions of who we are and the relationship between the individual and the personal, and the societies that we live in are always located within the parameters of embodiment”. The body is central to who we are to others, to their sense of our enduring identity, and so too “to that part of our own sense of our enduring identity that we derive from others’ awareness of ourselves” (Tallis 2004:233). Bodily criteria, such as height and weight, are used to identify and individuate human beings. Such criteria are even used for “mummified Egyptians, by studying their bones for unique patterns” and also for “identifying mysterious corpses by dental records” (Harré 2001:59).

The outer body is what is visible to others and remains (relatively) unchanged over time, while the inner aspect of the body is what and who the self *is*. Tallis (2004: 281) posits that it is this ‘inner’ self that amounts to self-identity:

the visible body, the one we shake hands with, is not identical to my identity: my identity includes my behaviour, my corpus of knowledge, my memories, the institutions I identify with, and so on. For others, at any rate, my body may usually reliably lead them to identify myself but may not deliver the self that they expect. I might have a relatively unchanged body and yet, due to brain injury, have lost my memory and all those things – job, relations with others, interests, passions, sense of being located in a framework of past and future – that define (and indeed constitute) my *personal* identity.

It was the pragmatists George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, along with William James, who were first to view the self as a process with two phases. They saw the self as a relation between inner and outer, consisting of the ‘I’ which is the knower – inner, subjective and creative; and the ‘me’ which is the more known, outer, determined and social phase of the self (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). According to Woodward (2002:21), the pragmatists’ notion of identity as grounded in the here and now, as opposed to having a transcendental basis, is an important contribution to the late twentieth century’s ‘sociological’ concept of identity:

The self reflects the complexity of relationships between the personal and the social in the twentieth century. As developed in the work of Mead and Cooley, this was an interactive self whereby identities were produced

through the interaction between self, through an internal-external dialectical process, and society. It is through the internalisation of social and cultural meanings that individuals are able to occupy their identities.

Social philosophical theories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries challenged previous transcendental, universal principles and emphasised experience as the source of knowledge about the self. The sociological tradition of identity theory is linked to symbolic interactionism⁵, which emerged from work of Mead and James (Marshall & Scott 2005:288), and Cooley's "looking-glass" self. Mead, James and Cooley's self was one that could be known through observation rather than metaphysical investigation and has become known as the 'empirical self' – a self that is reflective, conscious of itself within the world and acknowledging of its own actions and the actions of others. Gergen (1971:41) elaborates:

Charles Horton Cooley developed the theory that one's ideas of self are significantly affected by what he imagines others think of him...The result, said Cooley, was a "looking-glass" self, one that reflected the imagined appraisals of others...[Later it was Mead's notion] that self-conception is a reflection of others' views toward the self by means of correlational techniques.

Furthermore, Gergen (1971:64) suggests that some of the most common ways for people to develop a sense of self-conception within various social contexts are through *comparison* (one's conception of self depends to an important degree on how one sees oneself in relation to others); by *labelling dominant behaviour patterns* (learning, for instance, that certain behaviour is accepted as 'sociable' and other behaviour as 'antisocial' and then labelling oneself accordingly); by *assimilating* the *appraisals* received from others and by *role-playing* – or rising to a given role – which might include anything from 'motherly' to 'militant' or 'sporty' roles.

The use of language by the pragmatists as part of their foundation of an understanding the self has had important repercussions for theories of identity formation. Goffman (1959) was able to develop his dramaturgical model in from Mead's work, and found

⁵ The *Oxford dictionary of Psychology* defines symbolic interactionism as "a theoretical approach in social psychology and sociology...in which people are assumed to respond to elements of their environments according to the meanings they attach to those elements; such meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people" (Colman 2003:723).

that the self is negotiated and re-presented through social encounters and that individuals go on to use role-playing throughout their lives in order to work out their own sense of self. The radically empiricist work of Garfinkel⁶ and the ethnomethodologists⁷ drew from symbolic interactionism the idea that ordinary people view themselves, and construct meanings in the practices of everyday life, through the linguistic and interpretive skills they possess (Woodward 2002:12).

Developments within social theory associated with structuralism and post-structuralism shared this concern with language and representation (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). While sociological theories of identity found developments within structuralism influential, structuralism was itself swayed by sociological theory: “Structuralist literary theory was influenced by an outside force of a different kind: the rising force of the social or human sciences” (Harland 1999:219).

According to Lavers (1982:6), structuralism began as “the attempt to use linguistics as a model for the study of other human symbolic systems” and was pioneered by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss. Swiss linguist Saussure and other structuralists emphasise the formative role of language and representation in the making of identity. According to structuralist theory, the world around us, and our place in it, is given meaning and made meaningful within representation (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). Woodward (2002:79) affirms this structuralist position: “it is through language that we are constructed and that we come to know who we are. Language as a key symbolic system locates us in terms of class, ethnicity and gender through the meanings conferred upon these identities”. Woodward (2002:74) also suggests that it is systems of representation that help one to understand others, as well as others to understand our selves:

It is through such systems that others make sense of us; representational systems provide the means of classification. People mark themselves out as the same as or different from others, and are so categorized, through the language they use, the way they speak, the words, images and symbols

⁶ Garfinkel’s notion of reflexivity suggests that we make sense of who we are through talk and conversation.

⁷ Although ethnomethodology is not considered as a key sociological school of thought today, it is believed to have had some impact on developments in identity theory and influence on contemporary writers, such as Giddens (Woodward 2002:12) and is mentioned in this study due to its part in the ‘linguistic turn’ within the social sciences.

they deploy, including the clothes they wear and the practices, rites and rituals in which they engage.

The paradigmatic structural relation of words, which keeps them distinct by their differences, helps us to differentiate ourselves from others: 'tall' fixes a distinct semantic concept by virtue of a contrast against 'short', 'light' by virtue of a contrast against 'dark'. Harland (1999:221) suggests that the language upon which identity is founded is language familiar to us: "the structures of ordinary language (as our first and foremost coding system) set the pattern for all other cultural coding systems". Woodward (2002:164) contends that while the polarized and oppositional relationships of structuralism offer a starting point for the assessment of identity, they are limiting; it is more useful to understand these oppositional relationships as interrelationships. Doing so allows consideration of identity as being both fluid and rooted, hybrid and fixed, and so forth (Woodward 2002:159)

For the structuralists, like the pragmatists, identification is a process of naming, of placing ourselves in socially constructed categories, and language holds a central position in this process (Marshall & Scott 2005:288). Naming is a vital part of identity and essential in terms of representation and classification. Eakin (1999:106) supports the view that language and identity are inextricably connected, stating that the self and language "are mutually implicated in a single, interdependent system of symbolic behaviour". Giddens (1991:23) develops Eakin's point by asserting that memory is necessary for the mediation of human experience: "Virtually all human experience is mediated – through socialization and in particular the acquisition of language. Language and memory are intrinsically connected, both on the level of individual recall and that of the institutionalisation of collective experience". Symbolic systems provide terrain for the representation of identity, but through mediating human experience these systems are contested. It is through representation and the construction of identity that meanings are changed and reformulated (Woodward 2002: 162).

2.2. Narrative identity

Eakin (2006:180) describes narrative identity rather vaguely as “the notion that what we are is a story of some kind”. Ricoeur (1991:188) expands on this somewhat, defining narrative identity as “the kind of identity that human beings acquire through the mediation of the narrative function”. Identity is used in two ways, according to Ricoeur (ibid): to describe numerical sameness – *idem* – which is “the most radical form of similitude” and as selfhood – *ipse* – which is the temporal self. Rasmussen (2004:24) summarizes this, stating “at the heart of Ricoeur’s reflection on the identity of the self is the thesis that identity can be conceived in the sense of either the Latin *ipse* or *idem*. The latter term tends to emphasize sameness ... *Ipse* can then be used to articulate the experience of the self in time”.

Whitebrook’s (2001:41) description of narrative identity combines an essentialist approach with the notion that identity is constructed: “My understanding of narrative identity is that it is a product of self *and* context, combining what is given *and* what is made. Whereas a strictly constructivist position would imply that identity cannot be pre-given at all, the characteristics that make up identity – including narrative identity – do include givens”. One can draw from this definition that narrative identity is constructed by reference to, if not in conjunction with, the pre-existing and surrounding stories of one’s culture and history. Giddens (1991:243) refers to narrative identity as “the narrative of the self”; while Ricoeur suggests that identity is *acquired* through narrative, Giddens contends identity is *understood* through narrative: “the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others”. This reflects Eakin’s (1991:101) position⁸ that narrative is both a construction as well as a constituent of self-identity.

Whitebrook’s description of narrative identity suggests that identity is socially constructed – as was discussed in 2.1 – and that narratives exist *between* people:

There is a distinction to be made between self-identity as perceived and indeed constituted by, narrated by, the self and identity in a more general

⁸ See page section 1.1, page one.

sense, including the perception by others of that which makes the self recognizable to self *and* to those others. Narrative identity is then at once subjective and inter-subjective (Widdershoven 1993:10).

As is the case with social identity, narrative identity is embodied, which entails being aware of the self “as part of a collective; achieving identity through sexuality, matters of taste and morality, and property” and requires that the story told about the self be located in relation to the past and to its context (Whitebrook 2001:24). Furthermore, Rasmussen (2004:28) emphasises that narrative has the potentiality to link the past with the future by giving a sense of “continuity to an ever-changing story of the self”, and thus is able to express the “ongoing dialectic of selfhood and sameness”. Simply put, stories about the self reflect and make sense of identity against the inevitability of time.

Whitebrook (2001:9) asserts that telling stories is a “basic human activity” and that people “understand their own lives as stories”; hence our narrative identity can be found in the stories we tell to ourselves, about ourselves, and the stories we tell to others about ourselves (Whitebrook 2001:10). Laubscher and Klinger (1997:67) elaborate on the essence of narrative identity, stating:

It is our view that personality and the self can also be viewed as story. We contend that all people are story-tellers and create a particular story about themselves that defines who they are, that captures their essential and evolving self. We say that people make meaning about their place and purpose in the world by forming stories that explain the events of their lives in a continuous manner. These stories are important not only because they provide a window into the individual’s self, but also because they are part of the picture people have of themselves.

Life and narratives are interwoven and inextricably connected, as Widdershoven (1993:2) asserts: “A story is never a pure ideal, detached from real life. Life and story are not two separate phenomena. They are part of the same fabric, in that life informs and is formed by stories”. Ricoeur (1991:188) recognises this relationship and calls it a “privileged mediation”: “self-knowledge is an interpretation; self-interpretation, in turn, finds in narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged mediation; this mediation draws on history as much as it does on fiction, turning the story of a life into a fictional story or a historical fiction”.

Widdershoven (1991) describes the relationship between life, or experience, and narrative as hermeneutic, insofar as the implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories. Narrative identity is dependent on a mutual relation between lived experience and the stories in which this experience is articulated. Widdershoven (1991:7) explains this relationship:

Experiences have little value as long as they are not connected to, or...fused with stories...It also holds for experiences that are supposed to change our whole life, for example experiences of deep love or grief. We only become aware of the significance of these experiences by telling stories about them and fusing them with other stories...In this process the pre-narrative structure of experience is articulated and changed into a narrative pattern.

Whitebrook (2001:23) points out, in articulating life experiences in stories, a degree of personal agency is exercised: “the act of narrating involves selection, patterning, fitting events, characters and episodes into a story”. The fact that creating narratives necessarily entails construction suggests the creator’s awareness of an audience as well as various narrative techniques and effects. Narrative structures and techniques “indicate, among other things, that the process of narrative construction of identity is a matter of showing and of placing ourselves and others in the public realm” (ibid).

2.3 Narrative as therapy

Telling one’s own story, in any manner, can be cathartic and therapeutic and engaging in psychoanalysis involves much disclosing about one’s life and personal histories. Sarup (1996:16) suggests there are parallels between psychotherapy⁹ and telling one’s life story: “listening to people’s biographical narratives is in many ways similar to the work of psychoanalysis”.

⁹ Psychotherapy is appropriately known as the ‘talking cure’ and generally refers to the treatment of all mental disorders and allied problems by psychological methods. These methods, of which psychoanalysis is one, are varied and often rely on different techniques, but focus on the mental experience and associated behaviour. The term psychoanalysis was introduced by Freud and refers to a theory of mental construction and function as well as a method of therapy (Coleman 2003:598-603).

As discussed under 2.1, identity construction involves the inter-relationship between the inner and outer, the personal and the social. While most sociological theories focus on the external processes involved in identity formation, psychoanalytic theories are concerned with that inner space which constitutes the psyche, and the internal processes involved in identity formation. Psychoanalytic theories also address the impact that the social, outer world has on the internal experience and formation of the self (Woodward 2002:16), while playing an important role in explaining links between the psychic aspects of our personal and social selves (Woodward 2002:20).

Psychoanalysis and its related theories, based on the writings of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud at the turn of the twenty-first century, are accepted as having informed more recent work focusing on the ‘decentred subject’ – that is, a self which is fragmented as a result of changing social and cultural fields (Laubscher & Klinger 1997). Woodward (2002:22) explains further psychoanalysis’ approach to a fragmented self:

[The work of psychoanalysis is] one of the twentieth century’s major contributions to the understanding of conflict in the construction of the self, based on internal, psychic conflict...far from assuming a rational subject, psychoanalysis explores the possibilities of irrationality and the illusion of unity in the formation of the self.

According to Laubscher and Klinger (1997:67) “psychotherapy is mainly concerned with helping people construct healthier life-stories” and in doing so, psychotherapy gives the individual a “new sense of life’s coherence and continuity”. Through the storied retelling of their trials, people are able to understand or reconcile their own pain or anger, and recognise the motives of perpetrators. Narrative is enormously useful for many therapists and academics alike: apart from lending itself to the fostering of political consciousness, narrative offers a “rich space of exchange between the therapeutic and academic communities” (Gergen 1999:173).

Understanding ourselves, our pasts and our present circumstances, is possible through engaging in some form or another of narrative. Widdershoven (1991:16) likens psychologists to historians, stating that both try to “construct meaningful patterns, which give us a context in which thoughts and actions can be understood.” In the

same way that historians use narratives of the past and turn them into a more complex unity, psychotherapists try to make sense of their clients' lives by working out the stories their clients tell them. Narratives give our lives centrality, a sense of order and direction, and hold relationships in place, so that anguish, pain, anger or any number of emotions result when a narrative is prevented from being lived out successfully. The pain of marital break-up, for example, where marital happiness is the principal goal, is derived from a couple not being able to fulfil their 'marriage' narrative. Therapy gradually resolves the conflict, pain or anger experienced by enabling the client to '*re-story*' his or her life into something more bearable or acceptable, or to "conceptualize their trajectories in new and more liveable ways" (Gergen 1999:172).

Similarly, Woodward (2002:36) notes that one's present identity is produced through retelling the past, whether retold through autobiography or during therapy: "as in the autobiographical narrative, in counselling or in therapy, identities in the present are constructed through telling and retelling the story of the past". Giddens (1991:72) suggests that keeping a journal can be therapeutic, by virtue of the fact that it requires one to examine past events and experiences, stating "whether or not the journal itself has the explicit form of an autobiography, 'autobiographical thinking' is a central element of self-therapy". Furthermore, Giddens (1991:72) proposes autobiography commands that one that looks back as far as early childhood in order to "set up lines of potential development to encompass the future".

It is frequently the experiences of childhood and adolescence, and particularly the unmet needs at these stages in life, that produce the inexplicable feelings that emerge from the unconscious (to which they were earlier repressed), at a later point in one's life story (Woodward 2002:34). Giddens (1991:72) maintains that the task of autobiography is not simply to record past events, but to help the author to come to terms with difficult stages of childhood: "the autobiography is a corrective intervention into the past, not merely a chronicle of elapsed events. One of its aspects, for example is 'nourishing the child-that-you-were'. Thinking back to difficult or traumatic phase of childhood, the individual talks to the child-that-was, comforting and supporting it and offering it advice".

Young children who have experienced some degree of trauma, such as that which the process of divorce might inflict, will often not understand the full import of their experiences and it will take “a skilled interviewer to help them to both express what they have witnessed and to make sense of it” (Hendriks, Black & Kaplan 1993:2). Emery (1999:17) suggests that the thoughts, feelings and ongoing events which the process of divorce subjects children to, are the types of experiences which often form a critical part of children’s, and later adults’, psychological lives. Clinical accounts show that typical distressing or painful feelings stemming from divorce which children may experience, include

fear of abandonment; grief over the loss of the family or specific family relationships; diffuse anger at their parents; secret, irrational hopes for reconciliation; social embarrassment about their family; worries about each parent’s well-being; anxiety about balancing divided loyalties; uncertainty about their own romantic relationships; and/or worries over the practical problems created by ongoing parental conflict (Emery 1999:16).

According to Lowery (1989:226-227), psychotherapy with children of divorce is not an easy matter and needs to begin with careful assessment of the child’s reaction to his or her new family structure: “It is essential that the therapist remember that, from the child’s point of view, there is no such thing as a single-parent family”. The non-custodial parent is often very much a part of children’s sense of family, even years after a divorce and when there has been little contact with the non-custodial parent. Herbert (1996:20) recommends that contact with the non-custodial parent should be frequent and “free of the jealousy and competition for affection which beset so many post-divorce arrangements”. This is ideal but not often the case.

However, at whatever stage of development and regardless of the level of trauma – if any – Giddens (1991:76) proposes that keeping a journal, or working through an autobiography, sustains an integrated¹⁰ sense of self. While most published autobiographies are celebrations of the lives and achievements of eminent people, and as such single out these people and their extraordinary experiences from the mass population, ‘autobiographical thinking’ and self-interpretation are necessary activities for everyone and need not be reserved for distinguished individuals:

¹⁰ Refers to integration between inner and outer, personal and social selves.

Autobiography seems a rather peripheral feature of individual distinctiveness as a whole. Yet autobiography – particularly in the broad sense of an interpretive self-history produced by the individual concerned, whether written down or not – is actually at the core of self-identity in modern social life (Giddens 1991:76).

Both Freeman (2004:64) and Widdershoven (1991:2) agree that the processes of autobiography and narrative interpretation are hermeneutic. A story's beginning and middle are conventionally understood to determine its ending; however, Freeman (2004:64-65) argues that it is the endings of stories that determine their middles and beginnings. Only once a story has ended does it become possible to discern and understand the significance of what came before. Psychologists and psychotherapists endeavour to further this process of narrative interpretation, and in so doing reconstruct the past as something more agreeable. Their process is hermeneutic, in that "they try to understand the story of life, and, in doing so, change it" (Widdershoven 1991:2).

While therapy or counselling involves another person, keeping a journal or working through an autobiography generally does not. Therapy with a psychologist or counsellor is an important part of the process of self-interpretation and -realisation, but what is necessary for both journal-keeping and successful therapy is the individual's own self-reflexivity. For therapy or counselling, like the process of keeping a journal or 'autobiographical thinking' is not something which is "'done' to a person, or 'happens' to them; it is an experience which involves the individual in systematic reflection about the course of her or his life's development" (Giddens 1991:71).

Eakin (1990:130) maintains that it is accepted that narrative is very much connected with one's identity, and that an inherent understanding of and ability to form narratives is linked to positive social behaviour:

Neurologists and psychologists supply ample evidence to justify the claim that narrative is deeply involved in the construction and maintenance of the extended self, that mode of self-experience that we are socialised to recognise as identity's core. Much of this research assumes – explicitly or implicitly – that the ability to construct narrative is in itself a good; it

prompts us to acknowledge the adaptive value of narrative, associated with health, with functioning identity, with integration into social groups.

Self-reflexivity as well as the ability to “be in the now” leads to the self-understanding necessary to prepare for the future, to choose or construct a suitable life’s course (Giddens 1991:71). Therapy is a process of self-interpretation and growth, one which necessarily involves looking back in order to move forward and Giddens (1991:72) recommends “keeping a journal and developing a notional or actual autobiography” as means of thinking ahead in contemporary modern life.

3. IDENTITY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES

This chapter examines the relationship between autobiographic narratives, discussed briefly under section 2.3, and identity construction more closely, with particular focus on such narratives reflecting childhood and their potential to facilitate and demonstrate identity construction. By way of introducing the visual analyses in Chapter Four, section 3.3 looks at comic art as a specific type of visual narrative and three comic artists' autobiographic graphic novels are discussed. Under section 3.1, autobiography as fundamental to the self-construction of identity is examined in more detail, and the significance of imagination and fiction to recollections and reconstructions, is considered. The notion that the self is constituted in childhood and that likelihood of individual identity being fixed to one's family identity, are discussed in section 3.2 as a preface to Chapter Four's investigation of the impact of divorce on children's identity.

3.1 Autobiographic narratives

Freeman (1993, 2004) calls the process of autobiography 'rewriting the self' and stresses that it is a process of developing oneself, one of "refiguring the past and in turn reconfiguring the self"; the act of looking back at one's life through narrative is 'dialectically intertwined' with moving forward through development (Freeman 2004:77). Hence, there undoubtedly exists a strong connectedness between narrative and development and Freeman (1993:9) explains this relationship as such: "the concept of development, despite its customary connotations of moving *forward* in time, can only be predicted *backward*, in retrospect, after one is in a position to chart the trajectory of the past...development is itself fundamentally inseparable from the process of narrating the past".

Brockmeier (2001:248) posits a similar notion to Freeman's backward-forward view, that of a link existing between the beginning and the end of a life narrative. He also points out the relevance of time to this link, suggesting that "life stories reflect a process in time which, like the biological process of life itself, somehow links a beginning with an end...This connection is almost always based on a story of development".

Through an examination of one's own past, or, by looking backward in order to move forward, autobiography helps the individual to make sense of his or her life which "inevitably leads to a greater understanding of self" (Laubscher & Klinger 1997:68). According to Widdershoven (1993:3-4) the implicit meaning of life is made explicit in and through stories. In other words, in the process of recounting, a relatively unclear pre-understanding of life becomes a clearer configuration with specific form. Widdershoven's position is hermeneutic: he claims that life and story are only made meaningful in and through their mutual interaction; that prior to interpretation there exists no meaning. Freeman calls this the 'hermeneutic cycle' (1993:44). Ricoeur's position is comparable – for him it is "only in the story that the meaning of life really takes form" (Widdershoven 1993:5).

Autobiography is often employed as a means of communication through which we express and articulate ourselves to others. Autobiographical identity construction is not performed in isolation and if it is, it is done so with the expectation that others will consume it at a later stage. As Brockmeier (2001:264) asserts, it is anything but an individual enterprise: "autobiographical identity construction can only be understood as an aspect of the communicative and otherwise social function of this discourse". While our personal narratives may take many different forms (these are explained later in the discussion) whatever the protagonist's outcome, "there is commonly a construction of identity through the telling of the life story" (Woodward 2002:31). Identity formation is a lifelong process to which "the writing of autobiography is...[integral and]...in which acts of self-narration play a major part" (Eakin 1999:101).

The term 'autobiography' is not reserved exclusively for books of that genre. Autobiography exists in everyday life, in personal accounts, often spoken and gesticulated and at other times written, and is fundamental to the self-construction of one's identity. It is indeed, as Eakin (2004:121) points out, a process we use so frequently that it is performed almost second-naturedly: "autobiography is not merely something we read in a book; rather, as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living. We don't, though, tend to give much thought to this process of self-narration precisely because, after years of practice, we do it so well".

Brockmeier (2001:247) believes that an autobiographical narrative can be defined simply as a story referring to one's own history. He takes care to reiterate the significance of time, stating that an autobiographical narrative is "a story, or part of it, that refers in one way or another to one's life history. Along these familiar lines, it seems plausible to understand an autobiographical narration as human life as it has taken shape over time". Philippe Lejeune¹¹, one of the foremost theorists of autobiography, has emphasized three aspects in defining autobiography. Firstly, the autobiographical view must be taken from a retrospective vantage point; second, it must focus on an individual life; and lastly, the autobiographical view must be concerned with one's own, actual existence" (Brockmeier 2001:254). Following Elbaz (1987:1) the autobiographic genre can be defined in two ways: as either 'typological' or 'dynamic', the latter of which Lejeune represents (1987:3). Common to both approaches is sensitivity towards the problematic relationship between fact – or truth – and fiction, and the view that autobiography serves to illustrate this relationship.

The process of reconfiguring one's past and 'rewriting the self' (in other words, the process of autobiography) entails much self-reflexivity, and can be split into four stages: recognition, distancing, articulation and appropriation (Freeman 1993). The first stage sees that moment at which one realizes all is not well in one's life, as the beginning of the development process. One needs to recognise that one's existence could be otherwise before one can bring about change. Once recognition has taken place, one must distance oneself from the identified conflicts or problems; thereafter one needs to articulate "the difference between one's old self and the one presently being projected as a future possibility" (Freeman 1993:45). The final stage is one of appropriation; one's knowledge is transformed into action and the preferred self identified in the articulation phase is appropriated. Ideally one would experience these four stages as suggested, but even if not, the development process is one that involves retrospective and prospective time – looking back in order to move forward (Freeman 1993:46).

¹¹ See for example Lejeune's *Le pacte autobiographique* and *On autobiography* (1989).

It is clear at this point that the process of autobiography, of rewriting one's self, is a mediation – the act of self-interpretation is at one and the same time an act of self-construction (Brockmeier 2001; Eakin 2004, 1999; Freeman 2004, 1993; Whitebrook 2001; Woodward 2002)¹². Self-articulation and self-discovery “entail the idea of *development*, that is, the fashioning of a new, and perhaps more adequate view of who and what one is” through narrative construction (Freeman 2004:73). In telling stories about ourselves we are endeavouring to make sense of our experiences and give coherence to our lives, by piecing together the fragmented pieces of everyday life – from crises to the banal – into some kind of structure (Woodward 2002:29). Brockmeier (2001:270) explains this narrative construction as ‘retrospective reconstruction’: “The telling or writing of an autobiographical narrative unfolds the life course as a retrospective reconstruction, that is, a recollection of the historical order of life events. In representing this raw material, a life story takes form”.

Constructing autobiographic identity requires selection and a choice of voice in which to speak (Whitebrook 2001:35). Identity is not, as Whitebrook (2001:40) points out, constituted by a random selection or telling of characteristics or events. What is not represented in the narrative is often as important as what is: “the narrative construction of identity involves selection and representation *and* omission and non-representation” (Whitebrook 2001:71). Whitebrook (2001:72) says of the narrator's agency that,

In the case of narrative identity, an element of the choice involved is the choice of what to tell and what not to tell. Stories are constructed: narrative identity does not record or register every fact, but rather presents a picture, a selective description ‘drawn from life’ – in more senses than one. What the person wants to tell, or have told, about themselves may well emphasize the good and interesting, and skip over the bad and boring.

Woodward (2002:28) reiterates this, stating “we select key moments, respect what seems important or troubling to us and exclude other points. Absences are also significant in the construction of identity through narrative”. However, choices of what to tell and what not to on the part of the narrator invite appraisal, as Eakin (1999:141) suggests: “identity narratives generate identity judgements; the way we practice identity makes a difference: is the display of affect appropriate, is it lacking?”

¹² See also Bruner (2001), Gergen (1999, 1997, 1971), Josselson & Lieblich (1999, 1993) Josselson (1996).

This act of selection and arrangement, of placing events in a particular order so as to suggest some relationship between them, sets narrative apart from mere descriptions of qualities, states or situations (Whitebrook 2001:10). Narratives can become quite complex when agents, events, time, consciousness, memory and language are all involved and serve to “organize human experience in such a way that it is rendered significant, providing a connective thread between one state of affairs and another” (Whitebrook 2001:11). When complex narratives are arranged successfully, they are given continuity in the consciousness of the storyteller *and* the listener.

Yet even in its most basic forms, autobiography is always an account, given by a narrator in the here and now, about himself existing in the there and then (Brockmeier 2001:250). Autobiography is simultaneously about the past, the present, and the time at which both merge. Brockmeier (2001:250) describes this simultaneity of autobiography as a site for the “inter-mingling of all three modes or modalities of human time”. As Freeman (1993:6) points out, “the process of rewriting the self...in addition to being an interpretive one through and through, is also a *recollective* one”. Recollection and memory are essential to the narrative process and precisely because narrative is a process there occurs constant revision and editing of the narrative, allowing for “the assimilation of untoward events, the unexpected: the story is shaped and reshaped as it is being told” (Whitebrook 2001:39). Narrative structuring allows narratives to be revised, reinterpreted and to assimilate unexpected events; stories can be reconstructed on “the basis of *remembrance, memory or invention*; and identities can be retold in reaction to previous narratives of identity” [emphasis added] (Whitebrook 2001:39).

Freeman (1993:29) goes as far as suggesting that the process of self-understanding is, in fact, fundamentally recollective. Memory may have much to do with recounting but is ultimately an interpretive act. It is not about “returning to an earlier time” and “narrative is not about telling it ‘as it was’...Imagination is involved, a process of articulating meanings” – meanings that could not possibly emerge but through retrospect (Freeman 2004:74). Because autobiography involves the subject interpreting his or her self – the subject and object are one and the same – pasts and histories are inseparable from whoever is doing the interpreting: we are interpreting “precisely that which, in some

sense, we ourselves have fashioned through our own reflective imagination” (Freeman 1993:5).

Reflections are, undoubtedly, subject to the distortions and falsifications produced by, among other things, time – and if reflections do not end up distorted, are at the very least *selected* and then *reinterpreted* (Freeman 1993:8). Even if one were to allow for the traumatic imprinting of crises, “how much can anyone remember in detail decades later about life at age seven?” Eakin (2004:124) fittingly asks. He describes autobiography, the retelling of one’s own past, as a special kind of fiction in which memory and imagination work together to reconstruct the truth. This is what makes tolerable “a huge amount of fiction these days in works we accept nonetheless as somehow factual accounts of their authors’ lives” (Eakin 2004:124). Steinberg (2004:143) describes in his biography about a gangster named Magadien how imagination can enrich recollections, which then become valuable reinterpretations:

In any event, even if – indeed perhaps because – Magadien’s recollections have added to and subtracted from what happened, his account of this time is of great value...it is unsurprising that he blurred them with the stuff of personal myth; they are about the fount of adulthood, the origin of everything to come.

In a rather simplistic sense autobiography can only be fiction (Elbaz 1987:1; Freeman 1993:30). Through its duplication, autobiography is held to purport to represent a ‘truth’ about a given reality, while fiction makes no such claim. Autobiography involves construction, reconstruction, reinterpreting, selection, description and more: as mentioned already, it is a process of mediation. Elbaz (1987:1) even suggests there is no difference between the two types of narrative: “autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography: both are narrative arrangements of reality”. However, according to Elbaz (1987:9), whether a given genre can replicate reality is not so much the issue as whether reality can be replicated in principle; in other words, one ultimately needs to question “whether truth is ‘found’ or ‘created’ within social praxis”. Freeman (1993:30) shares this view, stating that when considering autobiographical texts in which the interpreter is at once subject and object “it becomes even more clear that the meanings one arrives at are in some sense as much *made* as *found*”.

Ultimately, it is not important whether autobiographies can be verified or disproved. What matters is how the author constructs his or her narrative, how it is put together to help the author make sense of his or herself (Woodward 2002:28). Eakin (2004:124) believes that only the author can be the arbitrator of the truth about his or her past. He suggests that the “allegiance to truth that is the central, defining characteristic of memoir is less an allegiance to a factual record that biographers and historians could check than an allegiance to remembered consciousness and its unending succession of identity states, an allegiance to the history of one’s self”.

3.2 ‘Childhood’ as a sub-genre of autobiography

According to Laubscher and Klinger (1997:60), due to the considerable importance of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud’s ideas in psychology, many traditional theories of personality deem childhood the most important sphere within which changes and developments occur. Freudian theory assumes that who we become as adults is determined largely by our childhood experiences. For Freud and subsequent psychodynamic¹³ thinkers, one’s experiences during early years in life influence the self in assuming a specific structure in adult life. Woodward (2002:34) shares this view, stating that,

The story of the self which is reproduced within the sphere of psychotherapy that is based on psychoanalytic approaches lends weight to a notion of the self that is constituted in childhood...adulthood is seen as an effect of childhood. In this sense adult identities are derived from childhood experience and an understanding of choices made in adulthood. Conflicts within the self are best understood through retelling stories of childhood, and especially of relationships with family members.

Noonan (1991:13) agrees that there exists an undeniable relation between childhood and the self as an adult. He argues that “the link between childhood experiences and adult character traits, fears and prejudices” is the result of direct psychological connections. The often inexplicable feelings that emerge at a later stage in one’s life, having previously been repressed in the unconscious, are frequently produced by the

¹³ The term refers to the dynamic interplay of psychological processes; dynamic psychology covers all forms of psychoanalysis (Coleman 2003:224).

experiences of childhood and adolescence and particularly by the suppression of unmet desires at these stages in life (Woodward 2002:34).

As discussed in 2.3, there are parallels between autobiography and psychotherapy. Both practices offer the opportunity for better self-understanding through a cathartic exposition of the past – people learn about themselves “by attempting to tell their own stories through exercises such as writing an autobiography or reconstructing their lives in psychotherapy” (Laubscher & Klinger 1997:67). Autobiography and psychotherapy are processes of identity construction, and Woodward (2002:36) reiterates this: “in the autobiographical narrative, in counselling or in therapy, identities in the present are constructed through telling and retelling the story of the past”. As discussed in previous paragraphs, psychoanalysis emphasizes the primacy of childhood and the narratives thereof – like autobiographic narratives – help us to construct and understand our present identity (Woodward 2002:161).

Childhood holds a similar relevance to autobiography as it does to psychoanalysis; childhood is often the site to which both practices return in order to understand one’s present self. The theme of looking back to childhood and adolescence is prevalent in the *Bildungsroman*¹⁴ – a type of novel that, although not necessarily an autobiography, deals with someone’s formative years. The ‘coming-of-age’ narrative is also a popular novel theme; again not necessarily autobiographical but if so, a way for the author to make sense of past hardships or suffering:

Many autobiographical texts, particularly those that document ‘coming of age’ in one form or another, are tales of progress and growth or of ‘seeing the light’ or, more generally, of coming to understand who and what the writer might conceivably be. From the present moment of writing, in other words, one often gazes back upon the past and charts that ‘upward’ trajectory whereby one has managed, despite the trials and travails that have come one’s way, to prevail, to come into being (Freeman 1993:9).

Woodward (2002:45) asserts that narratives that revert to childhood experience or a story of origin generally have some point, whether told in a linear or diffuse form. Apart from helping to make sense of one’s self, such stories focus on genealogy of family and

¹⁴ From the German *Bildung* meaning ‘education’ and *Roman* meaning ‘a novel’.

childhood as a key formative period. Sarup (1996:16) suggests that we are all “detectives looking for clues, little pieces of the jigsaw puzzle (stories, memories, and photographs) about our parents and our childhood”. While an autobiographic narrative involves looking back on the past, it often says more about one’s present state than one’s past: “the story of origin may well tell us more about present longings than about a past it seeks to recapture” (Woodward 2002:45).

What one experiences as a child can affect the way one views his or her own self as well as others; according to Gergen (1971:66) feelings for both self and others are based on the same childhood learning experiences. In certain cases, as Gergen states, “when children have been treated hostilely and their freedom has been spitefully curtailed, they develop a “character conditioned hatred” toward both self and others”¹⁵. Relationships with family members developed during childhood can have immense effect on an individual later in life. Favourable relationships can result in security in adulthood, while problems at this stage can lead to emotional uncertainty and unstable identities later in life (Woodward 2002; Rose & Rose 1969). Parental separation or divorce forces children to review relationships with their parents and family members and this can be particularly difficult for young children: “A marital separation may result in children reappraising their own relationships with their parents and, indeed, questioning the nature of all social relationships. For younger children in particular, there is the painful realization that not all social relationships last forever” (Herbert 1996:4).

The family is one of the primary social settings wherein children are able to live out their childhoods, develop close relationships and “find” themselves and in so doing their identities as selves (Smart et al 2001:16). Individual identity is very often tied to family identity (Emery 1999a:93), and Nichols (1989:71) demonstrates this through a clinician’s findings on the delayed reaction of a young woman to her parents divorce during her childhood:

¹⁵ It was Mead’s idea that a child observes and imitates the behaviour of ‘significant others’ around him (being mother, father, siblings, etc) and tends to adopt the orientations of these others toward himself, inasmuch as these others behave in certain ways toward the child. To be treated by others as competent or conversely incapable, is eventually to see oneself as such (Gergen 1971:41).

While the clinician's official diagnosis was "depressive reaction" the early clinical record also contained notations such as the following: "Major identity issues. Has no idea who she is and where she fits in, if she does." "Nurturance needs long denied." "Two older siblings have helped her cope well in the past." "Evidently her confusion about what her family is extends to who she is".

Rose and Rose (1969:205) posit that "the family is the chief socializer of the child", since a child is born into the world innocent and helpless but is expected after a number of years to function as a responsible member of society. For this reason, they consider family to be the most important institution in society; but stress that "the family is not the sole influence in the socialization of the child" (Rose & Rose 1969:209). If not the sole influence then certainly a prime influence, the family also helps to determine the relationship of the child toward other socializing influences. It is necessary to point out that childhood is not simply, or only, a universal state but also a social construct, and thus culturally variable. While children are common to all cultures, childhood is perceived and practiced in many different ways. With this in mind, Smart et al (2001:11) argue that "what a child 'is' reflects the particular socio-cultural context in which the child lives".

This impressionable time of one's life is often the "primary subject of an autobiography" because it is such a familiar phase (Eakin 1999:117). Eakin agrees that family alone is not responsible for a child's socialization, but rather that a combination of factors contribute to the social construction of identity in this period. Institutions such as the school and the church play an important part in bringing home the lessons of social accountability: "we can think of the child's sense of self as emerging within a crucible of family stories and cultural scripts" (Eakin 1999:117). Family should ideally provide children with a sense of belonging and it is through the articulation of home that a child seeks certainty and security (Woodward 2002:161).

Broadly speaking, parents reflect a greater society (which might include the community, class and ethnic group to which they belong) in their teaching and channelling of their children (Rose & Rose 1969:205). It is the familial, societal and cultural influences combined that shape identity; our identity narratives are put together in unique ways but are always influenced "greatly by our social and cultural placement at a particular time

in history” (Laubscher & Klinger 1997:74). As Lee et al (2004:39) suggest, narrative is a powerful and universal tool, which “unfolds in culturally specific ways”. One’s personal narrative is filled with images collected in childhood through contact with family and exposure to culture: “imagery and narrative tone are therefore childhood’s essential contributions to adult identity and the self-defining myth. They return in later years to paint our adult story with their own particular hues and colours” (Laubscher & Klinger 1997:69).

3.3 Autobiographic graphic narratives

Bal (1988:3) defines narratology as the theory of narrative texts¹⁶. Harland (1999:226) proposes that narratology deals with whole narrative texts, the most common texts being prose, but stresses that the approach can be applied to other forms of narrative text, such as verse epics, films or comics. These forms – or genres – of narrative texts are usually verbal¹⁷ but also include non-verbal forms such as representational art (Whitebrook 2001:10). In simple terms, a narrative text is a text in which there are one or more agents¹⁸ who tell a story in a particular medium (Bal 1988:5)¹⁹. The medium can be language as well as imagery, sound, spatial construction, or even a combination thereof (Brockmeier 2001:255).

The concept of text needs to be broadly interpreted in order to incorporate various visual media as texts. As Bal (1988:4) states, “some people ... argue that comic strips belong to the corpus of narrative texts, but others disagree” – those individuals who consider comics to be ‘texts’ interpret the concept broadly. Indeed, a text does not need to be a ‘language’ text to be considered a narrative text. If a text is a structured whole composed of language signs, then comic strips (especially silent comics) employ another, non-linguistic sign-system – that of pictures. Brockmeier’s (2001:254) view of creating a text is semiotic and supports the idea that pictures and other forms of visual

¹⁶ According to Bal (1988:5) while a text is a finite, structured whole, composed of language signs, a narrative text is a text in which an agent relates a narrative.

¹⁷ Genres or forms of verbal and written narratives include novels, novellas, fairy tales, myths, poetry, newspaper articles, history, biography and autobiography.

¹⁸ These agents do not necessarily need to be human.

¹⁹ Non-narrative texts include lists, descriptions and arguments (Bal 1988:8).

media are sign-systems: “writing means both a practice to inscribe (that is, to materialize) a meaningful text (that is, a system of signs) and the result of this practice: a meaningful constellation of signs that is to be read and interpreted”. According to Brockmeier (2001:255) pictures and words, imagery and texts are all interwoven into the same semiotic fabric of meaning. They are “overlapping trajectories within the same symbolic space, a space of meaning in which our experience takes place and in which we try to make sense of the world”.

Narrative as an end product entails the organization of events – the story – and the process of this organization – the narrative (Whitebrook 2001:11). Magnussen (2000:197) maintains that the term covers the story as such, as well as the narrator’s identity and position. It is a product of the expression of the unity of an individual’s life, and need not be literary, as discussed. The narratives in which individuals articulate their lives are most often very ordinary and relate everyday life and experiences (Widdershoven 1993:8). Laubscher and Klinger (1997:66) convey the familiarity of these narratives:

We are surrounded by story-telling in one form or another every day of our lives, and we express ourselves in storied and narrative terms – through television, cinema, parable, humour, poetry, novel, legend, and even everyday conversation...it would be correct to say that we share our experiences in story and, in so doing, create a shared history and a possible shared future.

Woodward (2002:29) agrees that we share our life experiences, and through communicating our personal stories become linked to a broader social framework in which more public stories are told. In this sense narrative can be used to explore the relationship between the personal and the social, which forms the basis of identity-construction. Self-portraiture could be called a ‘narrative text’ – and a convincing one, at that – if one appreciates the painter (and subject) as the agent relating something to the viewer (Woodward 2002; Brockmeier 2001). After all, the face is the site where identity is socially recognised and constituted (Eakin 1999:38). Although portraiture certainly does not preclude the entire body as subject matter, it is the face that most

frequently appears in portraits²⁰. The self-portrait brings together the artist, the subject and the spectator in a particularly interesting way, especially since the artist is the subject of the portrait (Brockmeier 2001:260). The representation of the self through a self-portrait offers an insight into the conscious processes involved in the construction of identity. Woodward (2002:97) argues that portraiture is about the self the artist endeavours to show others – the public, outer self, or the ‘me’. And concurrently the portrait reveals the private, inner self – the ‘I’ – as the artist may also attempt to show his or her most favourable ‘I’.

With respect to portraiture, and indeed autobiographical comics²¹, the question of whether autobiography can in fact duplicate reality arises again – how accurately can a portrait honestly mirror its subject? The view of autobiography being ultimately fictive is particularly compelling when considering autobiographic comic strips. What the comic artist Gilbert Hernandez, of *Palomar* fame, says of autobiographic comic characters can as also be applied to the subjects of portraiture: “you change the name of the character and the way he looks. That way, you can lie all you want, because most autobiographical comics are lies anyway. Whether the artists make themselves look really good or look real bad, it becomes fiction after a while – a fiction based on reality” (Hussey 2004: 88).

Hernandez’s argument brings to attention Art Spiegelman’s acclaimed biographical comic *Maus* (figure 5), which won a 1992 Pulitzer Prize Special Award (Sabin 1996:188). Although Spiegelman relates his father’s life story, it is also an autobiography if one considers that the narrative partly concerns Spiegelman’s relationship with his father during the time *Maus* was written, and the way in which the legacy of the holocaust affects this relationship (Sabin 1993:90). Spiegelman proves that the subject of an autobiographic comic need not resemble its artist – the characters of *Maus*, Spiegelman himself included, are depicted as various animals, the kind of which depending on that character’s nationality and creed. His father and all Jews are depicted as mice, hence the graphic novel’s title. The animals are not, with few

²⁰ ‘Portrait’ is defined as “an artistic representation of a person, especially one depicting only the face or head and shoulders” by the Oxford English dictionary (Pearsall 2001:1116).

²¹ This is not to suggest that portraiture and comics are formally similar (a portrait usually exists as a single canvas or photograph while comic strips comprise of several panels and oftentimes text) but that they are both sign-systems and as such comparable.

exceptions, intended to signify what they appear to be; they are used as metaphorical comparisons and through association allow Spiegelman to confer particular identities on the characters (De Angelis 2005:260).

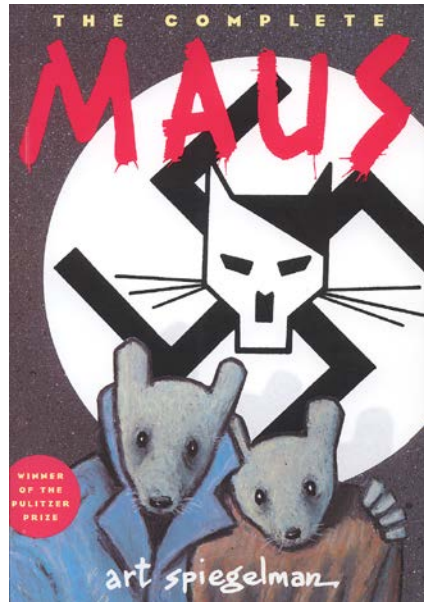


Figure 5: Art Spiegelman, *The complete Maus*, 2006 (Spiegelman 2003:cover)

3.3.1 *Graphic narratives: comics and graphic novels*

From the description of narrative text in 3.3 it is possible to deduce that a graphic narrative text is a narrative text in which the process of an agent (or agents) relating a story is expressed graphically, or more fittingly, illustratively – that is, the medium is imagery. One could define a graphic narrative as a deliberate and pictorial sequence of events (McCloud 1993:5). This study focuses on the comic strip as one specific kind of graphic narrative. Graphic narratives are prevalent in everyday life in different forms²², of which the comic strip is one.

According to Magnussen (2000:197) there exist varying definitions for the term ‘comic strip’ and these tend to agree on one definitive aspect: that a comic is “a sequence of images between which some kind of unity of meaning is created”. In addition,

²² Common forms of graphic narratives include information diagrams such as cooking, product and safety instructions, and some road signs.

Magnussen adds that comics images can be of a variety of types but at least some of them need to be drawn; and that text can be integrated into the image sequence, but is not essential – wordless comics, or silent comics, are also possible. His view of a comic strip needing to be partly drawn is rather strict; it precludes photo-comics as being considered comic strips, although they unmistakably meet the criteria of a graphic narrative. This view does, however, limit just any variation of sequential images being called a comic strip (Magnussen 200:199).

Lefèvre's (2000:91) concept of comic strip is slightly more forgiving: "I use 'comic strip' as a generic term, which I define prototypically as the juxtaposition of fixed (mostly drawn) pictures on a support as a communicative act". This model of the comic strip is considered to encompass all drawn sequential stories: stop comic, comic book, graphic novel, small press, bande dessinée, and manga (Lefèvre 2000: 91).

Comic strips may be not always be "light and funny as the word comic may suggest" (Viall 2007b:13); but owing to their name intimating humour – indeed humour is a technique many strips rely on – and the widespread misconception of their being produced only for young audiences, comic strips have long been associated with a predominantly juvenile culture. As Frahm (2000:177) points out, "to consider comics a subject worthy of academic interest or theoretical consideration appears to beg some serious effort of legitimisation. Comics always appear to have lacked something". However, Mason (2002:5) suggests that over the past twenty years "comics have come of age as a serious art form," and furthermore that comics are often regarded as "the quintessential 20th-century pop art form, linked to the emergence of mass literacy and the rise of the great newspaper and popular publishing empires".

The boom of adult comics throughout the western world²³ in the late 1980s was preceded by a period that saw the enjoyment of comics as a primarily youthful pastime – before this time the industry had been orientated towards all ages. It was the success of graphic novels such as *Dark Knight*, *Watchmen* and *Maus* that moved adult comics into the mainstream, and overnight comics "developed from cheap throwaway children's fare to expensive album-form 'novels' for adults to keep on bookshelves

²³ Refers to America, Britain and Western Europe.

(Sabin 1993:235). Comics have long been recognised as an art form in Europe and due to a more tolerant attitude towards the medium, adult comics were first to re-enter the European mainstream (Sabin 1993:184). By the late 1970s the Japanese comics industry managed to supersede the American industry and by the early 1990s was by far the largest comics industry in the world. Similarly to Europe but unlike Britain and America, the status of the comic strip medium in Japan as a valid art form has long been established (Sabin 1993:199).

With regard to comics in this country and the rest of Africa, Mason points out that “we’re very backward in South Africa, we don’t have a strong comic culture like other African countries” (Viall 2007a:13). Mason suggests that English-speaking countries are behind in the genre because they view comics as juvenile, unlike French-speaking countries. According to Mason, in English-speaking countries “it’s not seen as literature, it’s not popular, it’s not the norm” (Viall 2007a:13). While the English-speaking America and Britain have been slow to recognise comics as a veritable art form, non-English-speaking France and Japan have not. As evidenced by their use of the term “worldcomics” to refer to comics from Europe and Japan (Sabin 1993:183), Britain and America clearly see their comics industries as apart from those of non-English-speaking cultures.

According to Sabin (1993:236) the term ‘graphic novel’ gained public recognition in the late 1980s after the success of publications like *Dark Knight*, *Watchmen* and *Maus* (although Eisner’s 1978 *A contract with God* was the first publication of its kind to be marketed as such) and since then the term has become “emblematic of the comics renaissance generally, and the ‘adult-revolution’ in particular”. Graphic novels might present a complete story or a collection of shorter stories, or even a combination of both, and be published as a whole or as parts in a series; but throughout the stories there must exist a thematic unity. The term ‘graphic novel’ invites one to consider such publications as similar to literary novels, and in so doing challenges the familiar perception of a literary novel. Viall (2007b:13) asserts that “comics offer a different take on life ... and in some cases come close to literature”. Indeed, as Sabin (1993:239) points out, the expanded scope of the graphic novel allows for “greater character development, more complex plots, more detailed scene-setting and the generation of

mood.” Certainly, Spiegelman’s 1992 Pulitzer Prize confirmed *Maus* as deserving of the accolades usually reserved for great literary works.

Maus explores Spiegelman’s father’s experience as a Jew in Europe during the Holocaust and is anything but comic. This is not to say that there don’t exist a few comic moments, but these are usually a result of Spiegelman’s father Vladek’s odd habits, resulting from his time spent in concentration camps (figure 6), and are underpinned by the tragedy of the Holocaust. *Maus*’ narrative content is heavy, and as Viall (2007a:13) suggests, this is not uncommon for a graphic novel: “comics can be humorous, as their name suggests, but often the subject matter is weighty, and people prefer to refer to them as graphic novels or graphic journaling”.

Comics and graphic novels are still primarily visual narratives – it is this that sets them apart from other forms of literature. However, far from the naturalism of the “camera’s and the cinematographic language’s truth telling gaze” comic strip narratives are rooted in parodic tradition, which prompts a departure from the “canons of verisimilitude” and means that comics are rich sites of multi-layered dialogic meaning (Christiansen 2000:116-119). Thus, Christiansen (2000:119) argues, the themes of comics (such as the challenging of authority and social hierarchies, as well as textual illusionism) are generally in keeping with those of Postmodernism. Magnussen (2000:197) proposes that a comic strip in its entirety is foremost a complex sign and relies on a “global coherence” for its interpretation. Ultimately, for all its layered dialogic meaning and postmodernist parallels, the process of interpreting a comic is familiar to most people and unloading this often complex sign shouldn’t be too difficult: “comics are usually very accessible – the meanings encoded in the combinations of words and pictures are easy to decode” (Mason 2002:4).



Figure 6: Art Spiegelman, *The complete Maus*, 2006 (Spiegelman 2003:238)

3.3.2 David B, Marjane Satrapi and Lynda Barry

Cwiklik (2003:44) proposes that “the art of comics storytelling lies largely in the careful selection and juxtaposition of images and text”. Specific works by three comic artists, namely *Epileptic* by Frenchman David B, *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* by Iranian Marjane Satrapi and *One Hundred Demons* by American Lynda Barry (figures 7 - 10), have been selected as examples of autobiographic graphic narratives that display this thoughtful consideration of image and text. Each graphic novel sees the author return to his or her childhood and recount it, often memory by painful memory, in an attempt to make sense of that past. In the final pages of each novel, the reader is left with a strong sense of closure; that is to say, each narrative culminates in the artist’s making or deriving some sort of peace or understanding regarding the past being retold. As Barry’s title suggests, ‘demons’ are indeed expelled.

Each of the four graphic novels mentioned have received critical acclaim²⁴ and put paid to the misconception that comic strips aren’t serious or worth taking seriously. The protagonist of each narrative is far from the notion of a super hero; in fact, it is the human, ordinary and real nature that makes each character so likeable and easily related to. For this reason, autobiographies such as these are particularly popular amongst readers today, as Andy Mason²⁵ (Viall 2007a:13) asserts: “Autobiographical comix – or autobiographix as we call them, are a worldwide trend at the moment. Many comic artists are bored with super heroes and other genre-based clichés. So they are turning inwards to find more authentic stories”.

It was mentioned in 3.3.1 that comic strips – particularly autobiographic comics – tend to deal with rather weighty issues, at times thinly disguising the issue at hand with humour and are other times devoid of any comic relief. Lynda Barry explains that making darkly funny strips keeps her balanced: “My strips are not always funny, and they can be pretty grim at times, and I know I lose readers because of it but I can’t do

²⁴ See Arnold (2002), Cwiklik (2003), McElhatton ([Sa]), Grossman (1999), Meek (2007), O’Neil (2004), Tong (2003) and Wolk ([Sa]).

²⁵ Mason, cited in 3.3.1, is part of the Durban Cartoon Project and the editor of Mamba Comix, which carries the best comic artists in South Africa and is published by the Durban Cartoon Project (Viall 2007a:13).

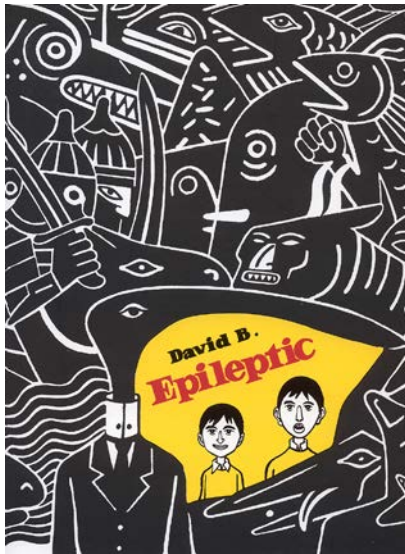


Figure 7: David B, *Epileptic*, 2006 (David B 2006:cover)

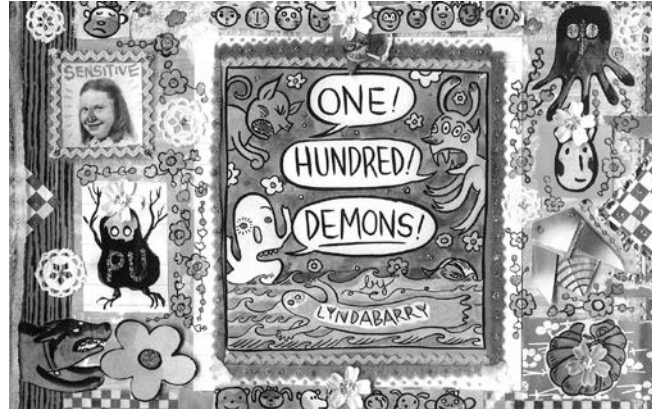


Figure 8: Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*, 2002 (Barry 2002:cover)

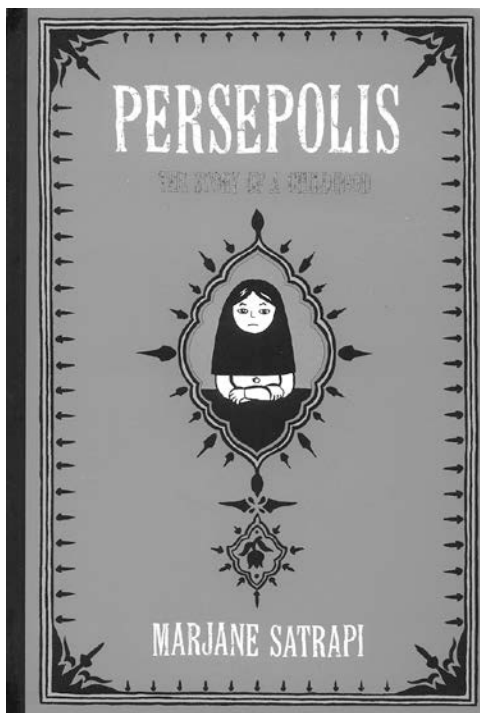


Figure 9: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 2003 (Satrapi 2003:cover)

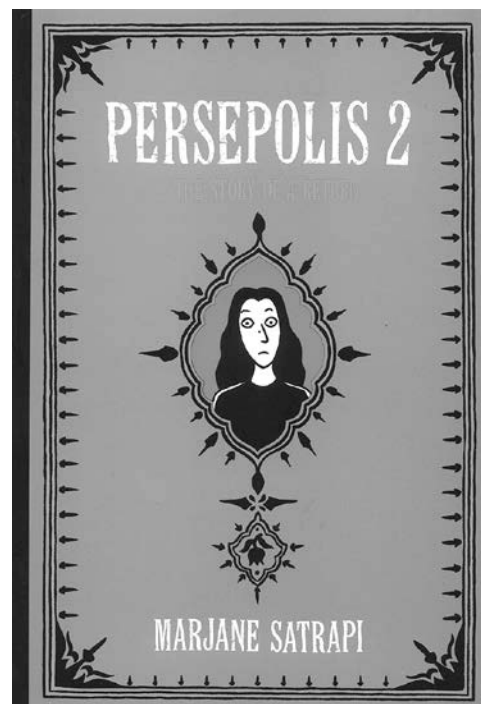


Figure 10: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis 2*, 2004 (Satrapi 2004:cover)

anything about it – my work is very much connected to something I need to do in order to feel stable”(Grossman 1999).

Each of the novels selected deals with a particular aspect of childhood: *Epileptic* explores David B.’s growing up with an epileptic older brother, which leaves little David feeling abandoned; while told largely from the perspective of a child it is “clear and unsentimental and devoid of the shallow narcissism that often mars autobiographical comics” (Cwiklik 2003:45). *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* recount Satrapi’s youth in two parts, examining her early years in an Iran under the Shah’s rule, to her time in Austria and later her return to an Iran rife with fundamentalism. Her own history is entwined in her country’s and in recounting her childhood, she also recounts Iran’s history. *One Hundred Demons* replays scenes of Barry’s childhood in what could be described as a broken home, exploring with a retrospective narrative voice how she feels today about events that happened forty years ago.

David B.’s *Epileptic* charts his childhood, from age five through to his late teens, as the second child of three to French parents and the reluctant younger brother of epileptic Jean-Christophe. *Epileptic* is a whole-hearted endeavour to appease his anger towards his ‘absent’ older brother, the disease that possessed him, and all the therapists and doctors, diets and new cures that failed Jean-Christophe, the Beauchard family and David himself. It is an intimate depiction of the family’s struggle with and effort to understand Jean-Christophe’s irrepressible epilepsy; revealing not only David’s coping methods but other family members’ too, particularly David’s mother: “their parents really are sacrificing a lot to help their son: They’re neither stupid nor oblivious, but caught up in something they can’t really understand or deal with” (Cwiklik 2003:43).

David, who was named Pierre-François by his parents but changes this in an attempt to dissociate himself from the disease, creates a shield of sorts through his tireless drawing of battle scenes with heavily armoured warriors. He develops connections with the characters of his visions, often resenting their following of him and simultaneously relying on them as a means of escape. Wolk ([Sa]) likens this ‘madness’ to his brother’s malady: “Jean-Christophe commands the family’s attention as he deteriorates physically

and mentally; meanwhile, Pierre-François slowly descends into a madness of his own, less malign than his brother's, but just as powerful".

Perhaps most telling is the way David B. employs fantasy to portray the tyrant of epilepsy over the pages of *Epileptic* as an enormous snake-like reptile (figure 11): "David B's depiction of epilepsy is fantastic, with the ornate, terrifying creatures swarming in from all sides to overwhelm poor Jean-Christophe. Not only is it a great visual interpretation of epilepsy, but it also says a lot about how he as young Pierre-François understands what is happening to his older brother" (McElhatton [Sa]). Cwiklik (2003:45) maintains that it is the "visual flexibility of the comics medium" that allows David B. to "graphically fuse the real with the fantastic" so effectively.

Wolk ([Sa]) believes that "first-rate" graphic novels are generally understood to be "cinematic" or sometimes "literary". Wolk suggests that *Epileptic* is neither, and the better for it: "it's neither cinematic nor literary: At every turn, it does things that only comics can do. It is entirely, obsessively, mesmerizingly the work of a single visual artist" ([Sa]). David B's artwork through *Epileptic* becomes increasingly elaborate and design-heavy towards the end; many panels make use of figurative, metaphoric or symbolic elucidations to reflect his perceptions. His dead grandfather, whose vision he befriends, is depicted as the head of a long-beaked bird, while the epilepsy is serpent-like with a never-ending body (figures 11 & 12). Narrative touches like these, according to Cwiklik (2003:44) "appear throughout this volume, demonstrating the author's skill in using the comics form to evoke a wide range of emotional responses".

As is possible with autobiography, *Epileptic's* narrative moves between the past David B is retelling and the present from which he is reflecting. His skilful mixing of past and present makes both narratives equally entrancing (McElhatton [Sa]). The significance of moving between past present is that it allows David B to speak with hindsight, as Cwiklik (2004:44) suggests: "Throughout *Epileptic*, the author skillfully shifts his narrative back and forth in time to incorporate what he's learned as an adult".

It is clear David B feels abandoned by his brother and wishes for 'normal' older brother to guide and look after him, rather than he having to look after Jean-Christophe.



Figure 11: David B, *Epileptic*, 2006 (David B 2006:76)



Figure 12: David B, *Epileptic*, 2006 (David B 2006:133)

He learns to cope by immersing himself in the fantastical and elaborate battles scenes he draws (David B [Sa]). This is at once an act of self-defence and a display of resistance. Cwiklik (2003:43) suggests that David B “explicitly sees himself as being armoured emotionally as one of his warriors is physically”. In retelling his childhood, David B has no doubt reshaped it for himself; Wolf ([Sa]) appropriately asserts that what *Epileptic* is “really about is the creation of an artist’s identity: how he reinvented his world as a way to ‘forge the weapons that will allow me to be more than a sick man’s brother’”.

According to O’Neil (2004:37) David B’s *Epileptic* is Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*’ clearest inspiration. *Persepolis* as a two-part story is a “wise, funny and heartbreaking” memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution (Marjane Satrapi [Sa]). *Persepolis* tells the story of Satrapi’s childhood in Tehran, which bore her witness to the overthrowing of the Shah’s regime and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, as well as all the destruction of Iran’s war with Iraq (Marjane Satrapi [Sa]). At fourteen Marjane is sent by her parents to live abroad and enjoy a better education than one war-torn Iran can offer. Her time in Vienna, as well as her adjustment to and new life in Fundamentalist Iran once she returns home, is illustrated in *Persepolis 2*.

O’Neil (2004:37) suggests that the reason that both *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* are successful narratives is that Satrapi is able to convey the unfamiliar in familiar terms. Her use of metaphoric and often humorous interpretations of weighty issues makes the potentially foreign panels accessible to the reader while underlying the seriousness of Satrapi’s narratives. Many such panels (figure 13) are interspersed throughout *Persepolis*:

There’s a sequence early in the book ... that climaxes in the description of a massacre that occurred when 400 people were locked inside a burning cinema. Satrapi allows herself the luxury of a two-thirds splash to show the wailing souls of the dead rising in anguish from the flames. It’s an effective and haunting image, one of many throughout the book (O’Neil 2004:37).

The comic strip medium lends itself to Satrapi’s iconographic style and the result is an ingeniously fashioned narrative, beginning with an intelligent and outspoken young Marjane in *Persepolis* and concluding with a grown-up, somewhat disillusioned but wiser Marjane in *Persepolis 2*. O’Neil (2004:37) argues that while he considers Satrapi

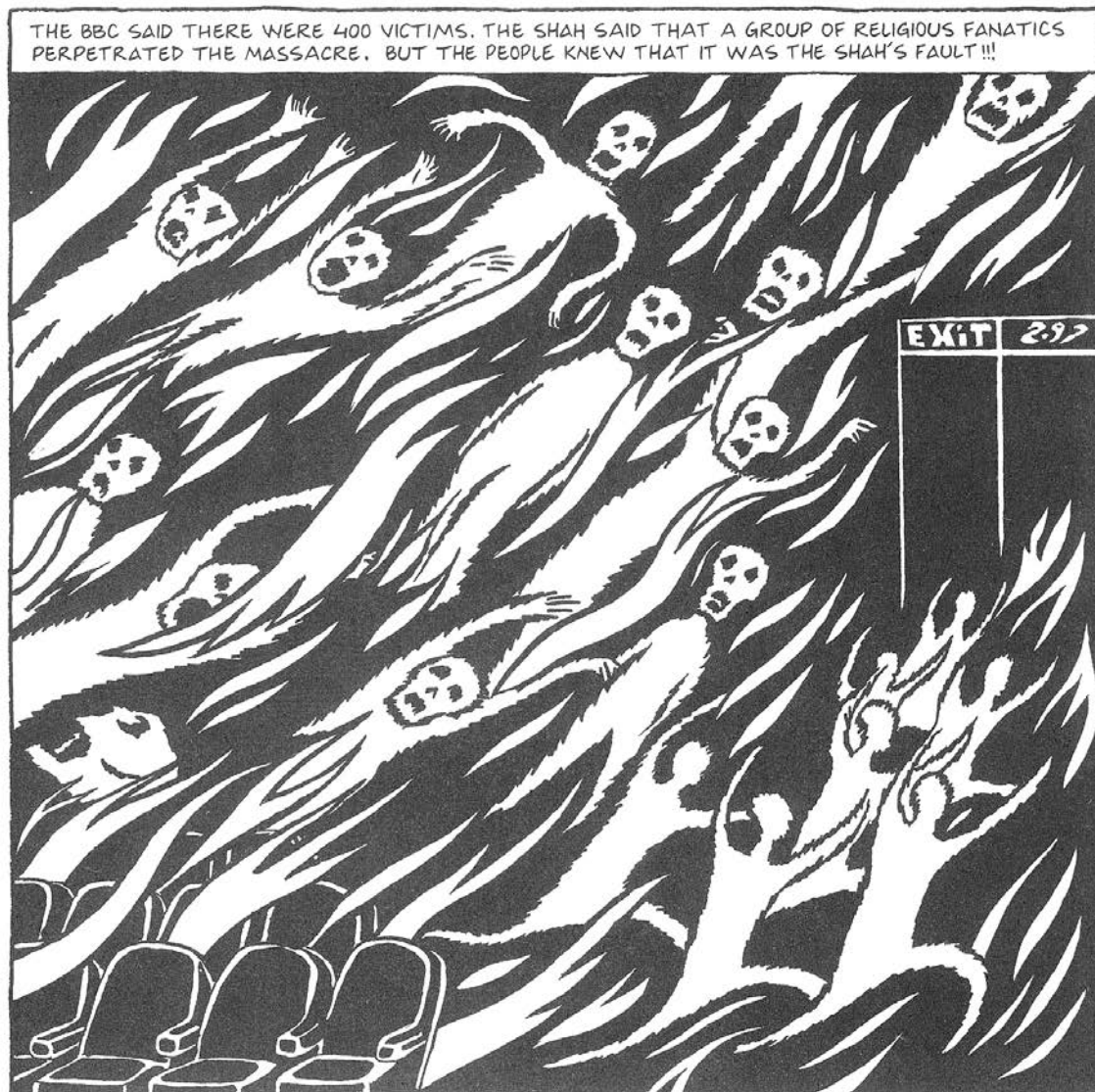
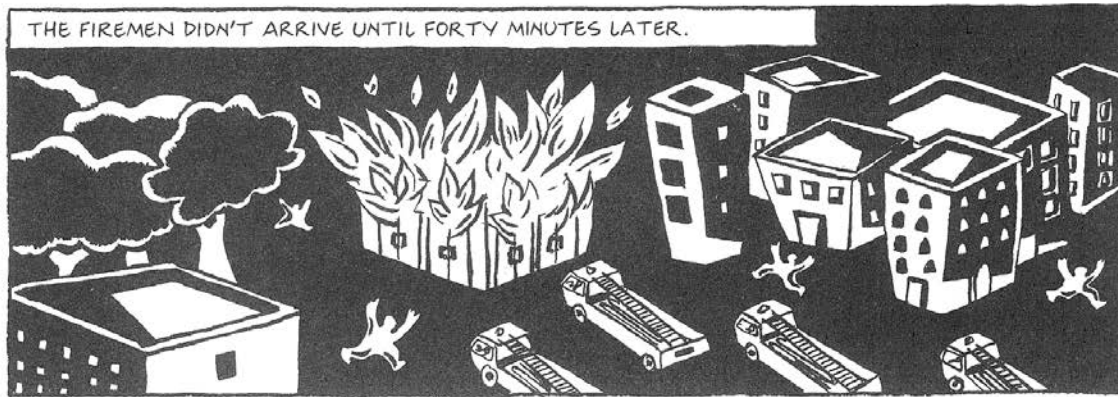


Figure 13: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, 2003 (Satrapi 2003:15)

“not a very good cartoonist” with regard to her technical abilities, her work is anything but primitive. Rather, she displays an astute understanding of how to convey complex ideas through her simple visuals. Satrapi is an accomplished storyteller, if not comic artist, and the strength and success of *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* lie in her combination of perceptive narrative text and lucid illustrations. Satrapi herself is proud of efforts and quick to defend the concept of the graphic novel against scepticism, saying that *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* “are not traditional literature, but that does not mean they are second-rate. Images are a way of writing” (Satrapi [Sa]).

Satrapi paints herself as an outsider – to a modest degree in her first novel, but more ardently in *Persepolis 2* – with a different outlook to her contemporaries, a resistance to the Islamic culture and, post-Vienna, a more ‘western’ approach to life. Satrapi is an only child to committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran’s last emperors, and she credits this heritage as foremost in shaping her identity. Satrapi depicts many incidences where her identity – individual and collective – is questioned by herself or others (figure 14). Woodward (2002:39) asserts that “in times of social upheaval ... identity crises become central to life.” Satrapi’s frank reconstruction of her childhood and adolescence retells the various crises she experienced, and in so doing *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* are an affirmation of Satrapi’s female, Iranian and artistic identities.

Lynda Barry’s *One Hundred Demons*, also a retelling of childhood – although this time an American one – is less a work of autobiography and more one of “autobifictionalography,” she would have us believe (Arnold 2002). However, her narrative voice, as argued by Tong (2003:52) is “empowered by all the directness and shaky truthfulness of autobiography” (Tong 2003:52). ‘Autobifictionalography’ proves Barry’s understanding of autobiography as forgiving of memory and the distortions of time, conceding that autobiography is part fiction, part truth. Meek (2007) describes Barry’s ‘autobifictionalography’ as “an idealistic mixture of truth and fiction that is more strongly based in the inevitable subjectivity of memory than in any deliberate attempt to fictionalize real life”.

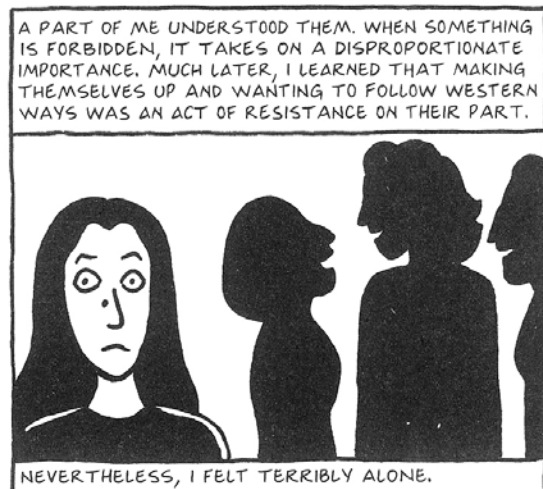
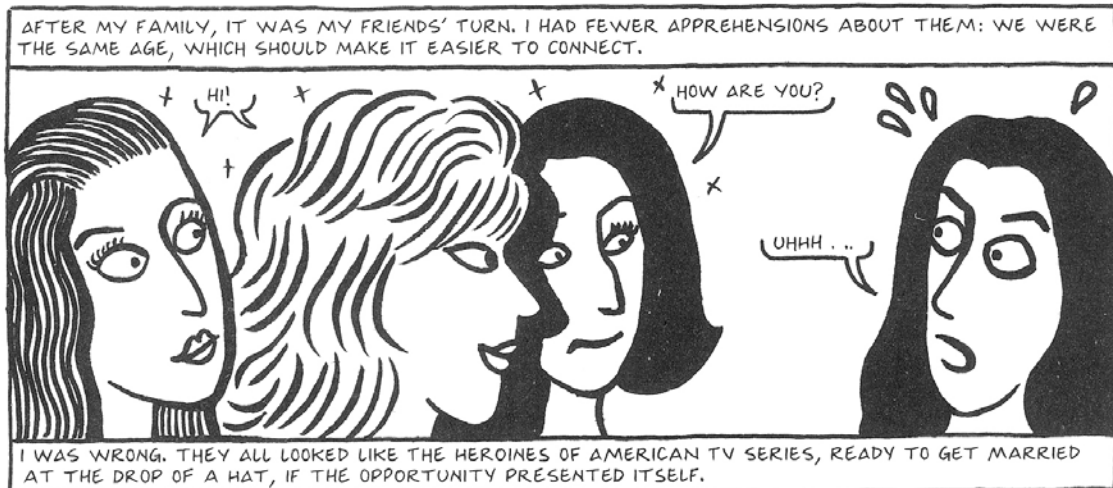


Figure 14: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis 2*, 2004 (Satrapi 2004:105)

Like *Persepolis*, *One Hundred Demons*' narrative strength lies in its effect as an exceptionally literate voice, while stylistically the strips' power relies on Barry's handcrafted details, suggesting the object's closeness to the author's spirit (Tong 2003:54). Meek (2007) asserts that it is Barry's handwriting rather than an indifferent typeface that invites this closeness: "contrasting with the prevalence of computer-generated images in contemporary commercial art and book design, Barry's messy handwriting is fresh and intimate, inviting readers into her private world". Tong (2003:54) shares Meek's view that Barry's handwriting allows the reader to connect more personally to her world and characters:

Barry's art and lettering present themselves as her voice in the absence of aural reproduction. They provide the immediacy and human connection a machine typeface cannot afford, and the reader is encouraged to find the author's personality in the ink lines that make up the guttural expressions and meaningful stares of her characters.

Barry's style may seem much like a teenager's scrapbook, but according to Arnold (2002) her style is "appropriately childish" and likely belies the amount of time and effort put into each page. Adding to this, Meek (2007) suggests that Barry is better able to highlight the "particular wisdom present in the child's mind" through her engaging style.

In *One Hundred Demons*, Barry's childhood is spent, along with her two younger brothers, in the custody of her Filipino mother. There is little mention of their father, who appears to have left the family home altogether after Barry's parents divorced. Barry's grandmother lived with the family for a while and is depicted frequently as part of home life. According to Rose and Rose (1969:212) emotional insecurity later in life is "generally traced to unsatisfactory intrafamilial relationships. Some investigators consider the problem a specific function of the "broken family" – that is, one where one or both of the parents are not present to aid in the raising of the child." Barry's mother is portrayed as particularly cruel throughout the strips, while her grandmother appears to assume the more motherly role, providing the care and affection Barry lacks from her mother. The strip entitled 'The Aswang' (figure 15), seemingly about a legendary Filipino monster, "turns into a fascinating examination of how dysfunctional mother-

daughter relationships can turn lead to loving grandmother-granddaughter relationships” (Arnold 2002).

One Hundred Demons is the product of seventeen smaller autobiographic strips about Barry’s growing up, and facilitated by her “fantastic powers of memory (or perhaps imagination)”, is an intensely observed recreation of childhood (Arnold 2002). While there is a clear ‘coming-of-age’ theme throughout the novel, each smaller narrative explores aspects of the change from childhood to the confusing world of a teenager. That time at which one acquires an adult self-awareness and begins to feel alone in the world is captured in the strip ‘Dancing’ (figure 16, see also Appendix A), which reflects the time when, as a teenager, Barry “began to feel self-conscious and could no longer enjoy the freedom of dancing for sheer joy. This seemingly minor phenomenon represents a fundamental shift in her perception of herself and of the world” (Meek 2007).

Through acutely observed humour, Barry depicts the sorts of traumas both significant and trivial through which children change and mature (Meek 2007). Her recreation of familiar childhood scenarios touch the reader in a way that only anyone who remembers what it was like growing up can be, and are powerful reminders to the reader who over time might have suppressed any childhood recollections of the daily pains and disappointments of growing up:

As we age our childhood recedes, growing ever dimmer in the distance; yet our characters – which were forged by those experiences that took place during that childhood – tend to remain relatively fixed despite the increasing distance from those formative years. In *One Hundred Demons*, Lynda Barry demonstrates again and again how our past is always there, hovering just below the surface of our conscious thoughts, pushing our buttons and directing our courses of action, regardless of whether we are aware or oblivious of this fact. (*One Hundred Demons* [Sa])

Barry acknowledges in her coining of ‘autobifictionalography’ that due to the shakiness and unreliability of memories, autobiographies like *One Hundred Demons* invariably include fiction – a fiction which, through its painting of common and shared childhood experiences, serves as a place in one’s life time to which readers can relate.



Figure 15: Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*, 2002 (Barry 2002:91)



Figure 16: Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*, 2002 (Barry 2002:45)

4. GROWING UP GOLDEN: IDENTITY, NARRATIVE AND DELILAH GOLDEN

The discussions of identity, narrative and autobiographic graphic narratives in Chapters Two and Three provide a backdrop against which the visual analyses that follow are considered. Three comic strips forming part of my post-graduate study of graphic narratives are discussed, in this order:

- *My mother's shoes* (2005)
- *Growing up Golden* (2006)
- *A mother always knows...* (2006)

These comic strips have been selected for their potential to reveal, through narrative, identity issues, questions and construction within a post-divorce, domestic context; as well as contrast the young, immature Delilah with her older, more aware, self. Each comic utilizes parallel narratives²⁶ and the juxtaposition of these seemingly unrelated stories better stresses comparison, emphasizes similarities between the young and old Delilah, and brings multi-layered meaning to the final narrative.

Taking into consideration style, line, composition and the use of graphic symbols or visual sign elements in comic strips is one manner of approaching this discussion. However, these comic strips will be considered rather in terms of their demonstration of the impact of divorce on parents and children, their use and the effect of parallel narratives, and the potential for these narratives to reveal Delilah's identity issues, while concurrently reinforce her sense of self.

Before discussing these comic strips it is necessary to introduce Delilah Golden, explain whom she is, how she came about, and my reasons for creating her. The visual analyses as mentioned above, follow Delilah's introduction. *My mother's shoes* deals with disparities, social and otherwise, as observed by Delilah; *Growing up Golden* explores Delilah's grappling with her own identity – both 'inner' and 'outer', while *A mother*

²⁶ McCloud (1994:158) suggests that parallel scripting in a comic strip results in an incongruous narrative; this occurs when the narrator's narrative does not correspond directly or literally with the panels' image and dialogue, which appear to follow a separate and unrelated narrative.

always knows... examines Delilah's position within her divorced family and her coming to terms with experiences of betrayal at various levels.

4.1 Introducing Delilah Golden

Delilah Golden and her sister Jane were born out of the desire and need I had, like David B, Marjane Satrapi, Lynda Barry and others, to explore my childhood and draw some sort of sense and meaning out of my past. Rewriting my history as Delilah Golden's has also been a step towards better understanding myself as I am today, allowing me to step away from my own, sometimes quite intimate narratives and view them as someone else's. By distancing²⁷ myself from my own stories I have been able to relate to them more objectively and decide what I like and dislike about my past and myself. As was suggested by Whitebrook (2001:72) in section 3.1, what one eventually retells to the world "may well emphasize the good and interesting, and skip over the bad and boring," and my Delilah Golden narratives obviously represent only a fraction of my past.

This is not to say that those details omitted are not important to my history, contrarily – as was explained by Woodward's (2002:28) statement "absences are also significant in the construction of identity through narrative" – what is neglected speaks as much about one as that which is included. Sometimes it is a case of details seeming too personal or revealing, and at other times aspects are omitted for the sake of narrative economy, concision and clarity. With divorce in mind, Jensen and McKee (2003:6) suggest that when children report on their experiences "they engage at three different levels: manifesting some aspects in their surface accounts; hinting at others...and leaving out yet other features".

Delilah is the elder of two daughters to divorced parents. The names Delilah and Jane are taken from the bible to reflect the Christian names my sister and I were given, although in its biblical sense the name Delilah does have connotations of seduction, but such a name adds to the notion that we are given or ascribed identity from our parents. I

²⁷ Borrowed from Freeman (1993:45) as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.1.

chose not to convey names for the Golden parents, as my own parents have always been “Mom” or “Dad” to me and since the narratives are told from a child’s perspective it also hasn’t been necessary to introduce them by name. However, in *A mother always knows*, their father’s new wife is named as Marie as this is how the sisters refer to her.

At this point it is necessary to reiterate the comic artist Gilbert Hernandez’s view of autobiographic comic strips, as discussed in section 3.2:

You change the name of the character and the way he looks. That way, you can lie all you want, because most autobiographical comics are lies anyway. Whether the artists make themselves look really good or look real bad, it becomes fiction after a while – a fiction based on reality. (Hussey 2004:88)

The Golden family are not intended to physically resemble my own, any resemblance is coincidental or, perhaps more aptly, unconsciously performed. Not all the incidents on which my narratives are based have actually occurred, and those incidents that indeed took place are not always represented as I honestly experienced them. I have often found it necessary to distort events – to ‘blow them out of proportion’ – in order to better communicate my point, moral or otherwise. As Barry²⁸ declares, ‘autobifictionalography’ is what results from this assimilation of reality and fiction.

I have found Lynda Barry’s comic strips most inspiring and feel her influence is evident in my comics. *One Hundred Demons* discussed in section 3.2.2, as well as her earlier graphic novels²⁹ are most appealing for their acute observations of the small yet often significant things – that are ostensibly overlooked by adults – which are so important, stirring or painful to the child involved. Barry also frequently makes use of parallel narratives, which I employ in my own strips. Often the narrative which is narrated appears to be unrelated to the illustrated narrative; however, my intention is that they are read concurrently and in so doing inform and enrich one another, with the theme or connection transpiring in the final panels of the strip. I find using two narratives more effective than one; that is, the comic strip’s conclusion is often stronger than it might be were the illustrated narrative a literal depiction of the narrated narrative.

²⁸ As mentioned and discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.2.2.

²⁹ Such as *The! Greatest! Of! Marlys!* (2000), *Come over, come over* (1990) and *My perfect life* (1992).

In keeping with the theme of a parallel narratives, the title panels of my strips are introduced with “The fabulous misfortune of being me” – a contradictory phrase intended as humorous, but at the same time to be read as a signal of Delilah’s reluctance towards her situation and her questioning of her identity as a child of divorced parents, and as a foreword of sorts to the melancholic narrative that follows.

I tell Delilah’s stories against the backdrop of divorce because I believe it adds a curious element – like epilepsy, a revolution or an abusive mother might – to childhood stories that would otherwise be rather ordinary. Depicted from a child’s vantage, divorce is that ‘demon’ which the family is trying to pacify. Divorce and its aftermath can indeed be a nasty ordeal and can “often cause long-lasting anxieties and psychological disturbances” (Giddens 1991:10). According to research conducted by Robinson, Butler, Scanlan, Douglas and Murch (2003:88), while a divorce signals the end of a marriage between two grown-ups, children are as affected by divorce as their parents:

They experience the events probably on much the same emotional terms as the adults. Their initial reaction is one of disequilibrium and emotional upset. This is followed by a period of adjustment in which new domestic arrangements have to be negotiated and learned in an atmosphere that can remain emotionally turbulent for some time.

Moxnes (2003:102) shares this view, proposing that divorce is a stressful process and adjusting to all the associated changes is both difficult and painful. Giddens (1991:12) posits that because divorce happens between two living people who can change their minds, children of divorce have a harder task to face than children of bereavement. Death is absolute and cannot be undone or reckoned with, while children of divorced parents could quite possibly harbour deep reconciliation fantasies. This type of fantasy may often not be overcome until children eventually separate from their parents and leave home. Herbert (1996:3-4) affirms Giddens’ theory, stating that: “What happens to children is very much like the bereavement process that follows in the wake that ultimate separation and loss, death. In some ways it is worse if there are endless hankerings for reunions that cannot take place, or loyalty-dividing acrimony between the beloved parents”.

This is not to say that divorce need necessarily be an entirely negative experience; as Moxnes' findings concedes that children learn to cope with the changes, stress and loss of resources associated with divorce when given sufficient time and support. Giddens (1991:10) also suggests that the dissolution of marriage can offer fresh possibilities for self-development and future happiness, as well as opportunities to strengthen intimate relationships beyond what would formerly have been possible. Furthermore Jensen and McKee (2003:5) assert that nowadays divorce is accepted and "staying together in a marriage/family 'for the sake of the children' has been replaced by an agreed wisdom that splitting up from a bad family 'is in the best interests of the child'".

If any party is marginalized through the divorce process, it is children (Jensen & McKee 2003:2). Jensen and McKee (2003:6) assert that children are best able to cope with divorce if they have some sort of narrative of events, or better still an explanation for the manner in which events have unfolded. Often no narrative is supplied and parents, acting with 'the best interests of the child' in mind, try to control children's understanding of the process and so exclude them as much as possible from the change. Similarly, Robinson et al (2003:88) conclude that children want to be involved in important decisions that are made about them during this life-altering time, and that "being left out of discussions not only tended to increase their anxiety and upset, it also hampered their attempts to reach a new sense of balance and normality in their lives".

Moxnes (2003:102) indicates that children of families that allow little or no room for negotiation – families in which children are seldom heard and their needs and wishes not given suitable consideration – feel "neglected by the parents, and lonely and unsure about their identity". However, children are not necessarily passive recipients of divorce; they create their own narratives, drawing on commonsense and the recognition of divorce as an everyday social phenomenon, when none are supplied (Jensen & McKee 2003:5). Jensen and McKee (2003:8) also point out that accepting their parents' divorce does not necessarily mean that children accept the decision: their coping effectively "does not represent unconditional acceptance of parental choices...Children's agency is largely a matter of coping with adults' decisions".

While the amount and type of information which parents furnish their children with shapes their perception of separation and divorce, children's age and stage of development also have bearing on their understanding. Younger children struggle more than older children, as Textor (1989:12) suggests: "Young children have the greatest problems in grasping the meaning of separation and divorce. They may react with denial, may feel rejected and unloved, may fear being overwhelmed by intense emotions, or may have anxiety-provoking fantasies of parental abandonment". "Divorce may also be more difficult for young children, according to more cognitive perspectives, because preschoolers have a limited capacity to understand the break-up...the improved understanding of children six to eight years old allows for greater acceptance of divorce; thus, grief replaces denial." (Emery 1999a:59). Furthermore, it is most likely that it will be young children involved in the leading up to, and aftermath of, divorce, especially as the separation of their parents – which tends to affect children most – is likely to precede divorce by several years. Undoubtedly, as has been shown through studies, separation is deeply distressing for children (Herbert 1996:3).

Emery (1999b:16) explains that lesser psychological experiences significant to the child, such as unhappy memories of the past, worries about ongoing relationships, or longing for things to be different in the future are

...examples of distressed, as opposed to disordered, behaviour, or what has been termed psychological "pain"... In many respects, particularly from the outside looking in, distressed or painful behaviour is of considerably less significance than disordered behaviour. Still, distressing memories, emotions and wishes are important, especially from the inside looking out in terms of the child's inner experience.

My comic strips about Delilah and her family are not intended to reproduce extreme scenarios of post-divorce family life, nor examine related disordered behaviour; rather, they are reflections of subtle memories and small experiences of distress.

4.2 Relations of difference in *My mother's shoes*

The narrative through *My mother's shoes* (Appendix B) is a simple account of a single-mother's efforts to support and provide for her daughters being misinterpreted and

overlooked by her eldest daughter. Delilah displays a materialistic and immature attitude throughout the narrative, which contrasts starkly against the selflessness of her mother. The comic strip also alludes to the financial strain which divorce can often place on the custodial parent.

In the first six panels we see Delilah arrive home from school, where Miriam, who appears to be her mother's domestic worker, greets her. An older³⁰ Delilah introduces her mother's "cheap, white, canvas takkies"³¹ as something her younger self hated about her mother. The second page – panels one to six – show Delilah in the kitchen with Miriam, while the narrative about her mother's shoes continues. An older Delilah explains her embarrassment of the shoes as they became worn out, and expresses the desire she had for her mother to wear 'nice' shoes, as some of the girl's mothers from her school did.

She states flatly in panel four, page two, "But my mother was never like that" which refers to the previous panel's "smart-looking" (figure 17). Delilah's indignation at her mother's embarrassing choice of shoes and failure to look 'smart' appears to have been compounded by the introduction of her father's second wife. Delilah confesses she "adored her immediately"³² and goes on to describe this "well-groomed" woman over the third page. As she describes her childhood perception of this woman, it becomes clear that she is what Delilah considers a "smart-looking" woman, and as such very unlike her own mother. This woman had no children of her own, was able to keep her hair long and her nails painted. In panel six on page three Delilah admits, "I remember always feeling so proud to be seen with my well-groomed stepmother" (figure 18) which is a harsh comparison to the embarrassment described in earlier panels which she felt about her mother.

On the last page over panels one and three Delilah reveals that what left the greatest impression on her was her father's second wife's "extensive collection of nice shoes" (figure 19). Again, she invites comparison between her mother and this woman by

³⁰ Delilah, narrating, begins her narrative with "As a child I remember...", suggesting she no longer considers herself to be a child.

³¹ Quoted from panel two.

³² Quoted from panel 12.



Figure 17: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2005 (Clarke 2005: 2)



Figure 18: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2005 (Clarke 2005: 3)



Figure 19: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2005 (Clarke 2005: 4)

describing the pair of shoes she was struck by the most – her white takkies. She acknowledges that they must have been “an expensive kind” and that they were only worn on Sundays (figure 19). Although it is not directly expressed, one can deduce that Delilah, growing up, felt a certain amount of resentment towards her mother, through her use of words like “cheap”, “hated” and “embarrassed”. She was far more accepting of her father’s second wife, evidenced in words like “adored”, “beautiful” and “proud”. Often in the aftermath of a divorce school-age children express their anger at the dissolution of their family similarly to Delilah’s resentment, as Herbert (1996:8) describes:

...grief and sadness remain a prominent feature, but anger becomes more marked. This is usually directed at the parents, especially the one with whom the child is living – which more often than not means the mother...Regardless of the actual events leading to the breakdown, she is likely to be blamed by the child for everything that has happened. The absent father is quite likely to be idealized (again, regardless of realities) while the mother is held responsible for driving him away.

Not only do mothers bear the brunt of their children’s anger, they also more often than not take strain in other ways. Perhaps most obvious is financial strain: “The down side for mothers is mainly financial. Even with some child-support payments from their former spouses, they are usually considerably worse off, unless or until they remarry, and most usually take on more out-of-home work” (Maccoby 1999:65). However, a single income is not specific to divorced mothers; Herbert (1996:15) suggests that what single mothers face is the same, whether they are unmarried, separated, divorced or widowed, they will need to find enough time and energy in each day to run a household.

There is evidence in *My mother’s shoes* that Delilah’s mother is a busy woman: has neither the time nor resources to attend to her appearance, Delilah makes her own way home from school, her mother is out when she arrives home but had earlier baked muffins for her and prepared supper. What Delilah overlooks in her fixation with women’s shoes and her mother’s lack of concern for her appearance, is the obvious effort her mother makes to support and provide for Delilah and her sister. This is made especially clear in the last two panels of the comic, where Delilah is shown lying on her bed, thinking to herself “What’s the matter with her? Why won’t she just buy herself decent shoes? Maybe she can’t afford any?” (figure 20) The next

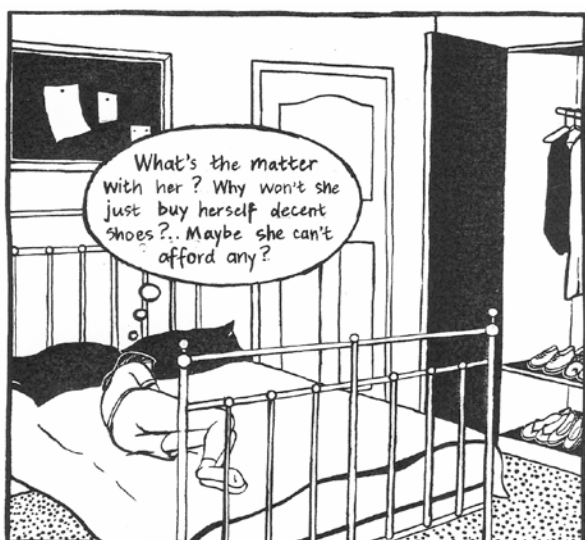


Figure 20: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2005 (Clarke 2005: 4)

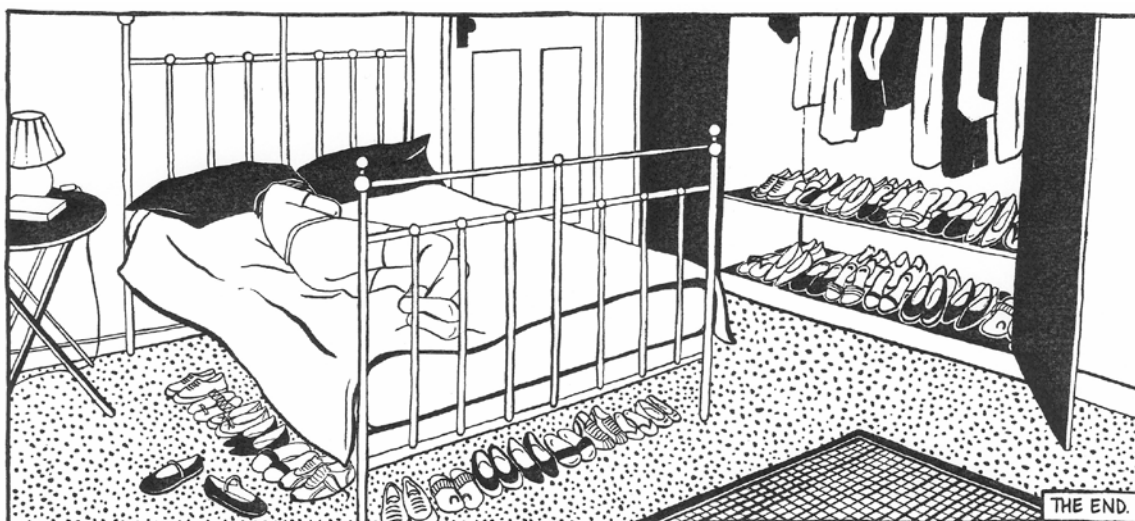


Figure 21: Catherine Clarke, *My mother's shoes*, 2005 (Clarke 2005: 4)

and final panel shows more of Delilah's bedroom and reveals her own extensive shoe collection, in the cupboard and under her bed (figure 21).

Delilah's wondering whether her mother has money to buy herself new shoes is satisfied by the display of all her shoes. While the viewer and the older Delilah are aware of the irony, the young Delilah cannot see that her mother's priorities simply lie in putting her daughters before herself – on many levels – and instead Delilah becomes the personification of her lonely, post-divorce, pre-adolescent situation.

4.3 Dealing with identity in *Growing up Golden*

The *Growing up Golden* (Appendix C) narrative examines the notion of physiognomy³³ and shows Delilah trying to reconcile her outward appearance with her 'inner' identity. It also looks at Delilah's relationship with her mother and the way Delilah's identity and place within the family has been ascribed to her by virtue of a physical likeness to her father. Delilah narrates how she believes she came to understand beauty as she does, and this is juxtaposed against an intentionally uneventful illustrated narrative, which shows a brief conversation between a jaded Delilah and a more excitable, noticeably younger Jane. After rebuffing Jane's offer of a game of Scrabble, Delilah settles in another room to page through family photo albums.

In the same way that the parallel narratives of Barry's comic strips might seem incongruent, the narrated story of *Growing up Golden* initially appears to be unrelated to the illustrated narrative. The two coincide on the last page where in the third panel (figure 22) confesses: "I would spend hours looking at photographs taken of her as a young woman..." and the sixth and final panel (figure 23) concludes with Delilah looking through one of her mother's photo albums. Delilah-the-narrator speaks with a

³³ According to Colman (2003:559) this refers to the art of "judging personality from physical appearance, especially from the face".

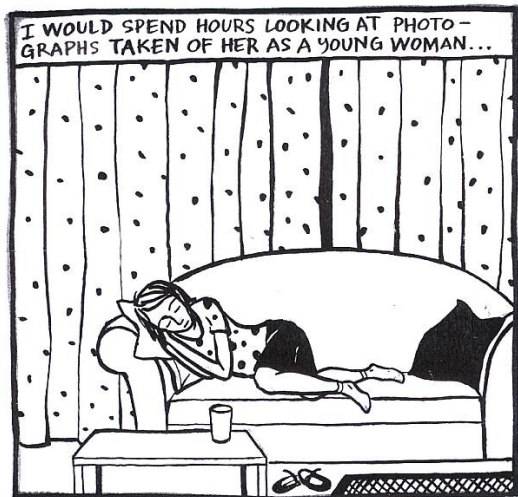


Figure 22: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 4)



Figure 23: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 4)

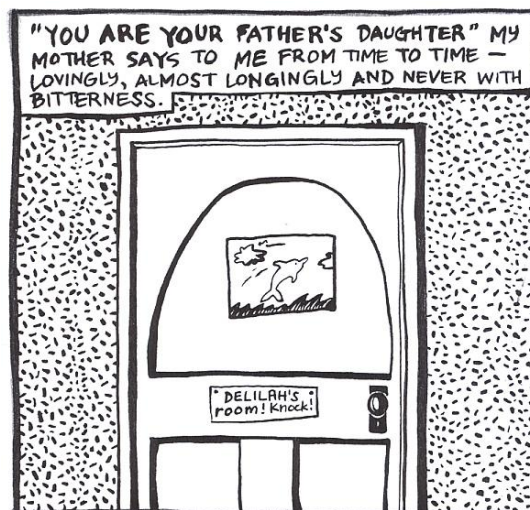


Figure 24: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 1)

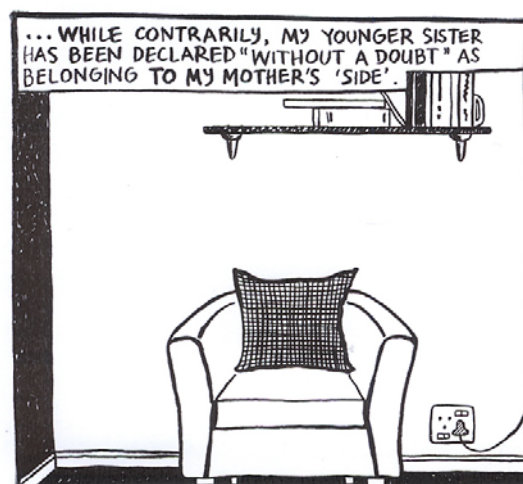


Figure 25: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 4)

retrospective, almost nostalgic tone about her childhood feelings on beauty, indirectly suggesting that she now considers those feelings somewhat inane and has long since discarded of them: “but in retrospect I realize I did have a curious sense of human beauty”,³⁴.

Speaking about herself, Delilah indirectly speaks of her mother too; this inevitability is also prevalent in other Delilah Golden narratives, even when her mother is only briefly mentioned. What Delilah neglects to recount about her mother is sometimes more apparent than what is recounted, and in some cases the success of the narrative relies on this transparency. Discussing Kim Chernin’s autobiography *In my Mother’s House: A Daughter’s Story* (1983), Eakin (1999:179) suggests that “mothers and daughters are so intimately bound in the process of identity formation that to tell the story of the one is necessarily to tell the story of the other”. He points out that relational identity needs to be understood in generational perspective, because every mother has also been a daughter.

Growing up Golden begins with a truism that Delilah is told “from time to time” by her mother (figure 24). The statement “you are your father’s daughter” seems rather obvious, to Delilah’s mother at least, but reveals more about her mother than Delilah’s connection to her father. It is a blatant but fond ascription of identity. The fact that it is said “lovingly, almost longingly and never with bitterness” suggests that with respect to anything other than her children, Delilah’s mother speaks acrimoniously about her ex-husband. It also entertains the possibility that there was a time when Delilah’s parents indeed spoke lovingly of and to each other. The text in the fourth and fifth panels (figure 25) reads:

In fact, for as long as I can remember, it has always been accepted that I am by nature and appearance a “Golden” ... while contrarily, my younger sister has been declared “without a doubt” as belonging to my mother’s ‘side’.

At this point in Delilah’s discussion several things are made clear. Firstly, that her mother and father are quite different – in both character and appearance. Secondly, that Delilah and her sister too are different by these standards – opposites in fact; Delilah is

³⁴ Quoted from the second panel of page two.

a reflection of their father and Jane of their mother. These are differences neither Delilah nor her sister have instated, but were likely introduced by their mother or an adult with a similar 'objective' vantage – one can almost imagine the sort of compliment that might have been passed when the two were young, as is often done at the sight of newly born babies: “She has her father’s eyes, how adorable!” or “Lovely curls, just like her mother!”

What also becomes clear in these two panels is the idea of opposing families or sides: Delilah’s mother’s ‘side’ versus her father’s. This is particularly pertinent, as during a divorce parents tend to ‘do battle’ for custody of their children, and children become seen as ‘assets’ when making a settlement (Jensen & McKee 2003:5, Wade & Smart 2003:108). In the first panel of the second page (figure 26), Delilah describes her self as envious of her sister and suggests that she finds her mother’s qualities more favourable than her father’s: “I was uncoordinated, awkward and skinny and envied my sister’s long limbs, olive complexion and relaxed nature (all characteristic of my mother’s side)”. The title of the comic, *Growing up Golden*, as well as Delilah’s register (“accepted” and “without a doubt”) suggest that she has resigned herself to her ‘Golden’ identity and fate, which is painted as anything but golden.

Mead’s observation that a child tends to adopt the orientations of significant others (being mother, father or siblings) toward his or herself was discussed in section 3.1.1. To be treated by others as competent or incapable, or any number of things, is eventually to see oneself as such (Gergen 1971:41). Delilah’s acceptance of her ‘Golden’ identity reflects this theory. Like most young children do, a young Delilah as evidenced by her older narrative voice, accepted what she was told as a child. It is through hindsight that the older Delilah is able to question her treatment as a child and challenge the identity that was constructed for her.

Her adoption of her mother’s opinion aside, Delilah’s early concept of beauty, and consequently her understanding of her own identity, is shaped within a social realm beyond her relationship to her parents. She mentions two incidents, involving a young friend and an older male friend of her father’s, which could account for her “displaced

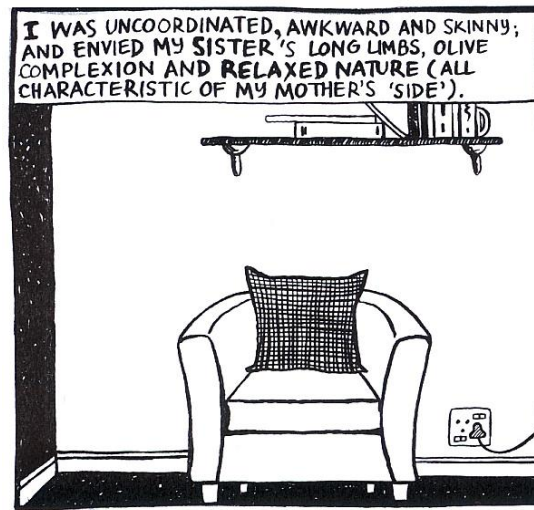


Figure 26: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 2)

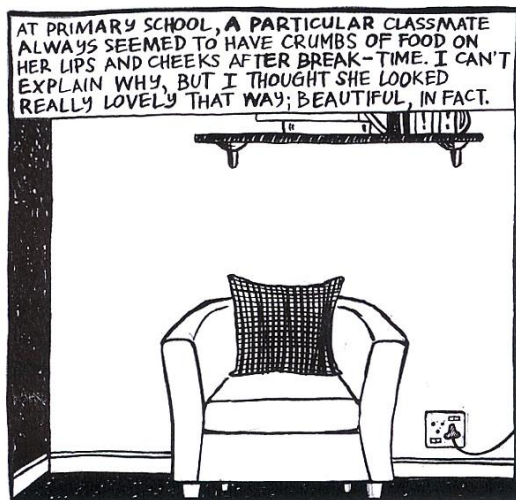


Figure 27: Catherine Clarke, *Growing up Golden*, 2006 (Clarke 2006: 2)



Figure 28: Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*, 2002 (Barry 2002:42)

sense of beauty”³⁵. The first incident (figure 27) was the appreciation of the beauty, or that which Delilah understood as beautiful, of a classmate: “At primary school, a particular classmate always seemed to have crumbs of food on her lips and cheeks after break-time. I can’t explain why, but I thought she looked really lovely that way; beautiful, in fact”. The older Delilah goes on to explain how attempts to imitate this particular classmate were rebuked by her mother.

I was pleased to find that this seemingly odd type of childhood infatuation is also explored in Barry’s *One Hundred Demons*. Barry’s vignette *Dancing*, briefly mentioned in section 3.2.2, describes how as a child Barry loved to dance and even took hula classes in order to dance like her hula-dancing Filipino cousins. She develops an infatuation with a particular girl who danced well (figure 28):

There was a girl who could dance in a way that made us all stand still. She moved in ways we’d never seen. I was crazy about her and mystified by her and scared of her too. She was beautiful and moody. Her mother was dead.

Most often, as discussed in section 2.1, our sense of identity is comparatively constructed: who we are is defined by what we *are* and what we *are not*, in comparison to others, and children tend to identify themselves and others accordingly. Woodward (2002:xii) asserts that “identities are marked symbolically and are reproduced through representational systems.” Indeed, identity is not constructed in a vacuum but through gauging our behaviour against that of social others, such as our friends, family or colleagues: “social interaction does much to furnish the basic repertoire of concepts used by the person to understand himself and to guide his conduct” (Gergen 1971:40).

Despite the negative light in which an older Delilah’s retrospective narrative might have positioned her mother, and especially her feeling that an identity she doesn’t agree with was forced on her, Delilah still acknowledges that she owes her sense of beauty (and on another level, certainly, her sense of self) to her mother: “Never the less, my mother was my golden standard when it came to ascertaining beauty.” Rather pitifully, Delilah admits in the third and fourth panels of the last page (figure 22) that:

³⁵ Quoted from the third panel of page three.

I would spend hours looking at photographs taken of her as a young woman
... and entertain the possibility that one day I'd outgrow my 'Golden'
physique and be as beautiful as her.

The illustration corroborates this; we see Delilah choose a "Christmas – 1971" album (presumably containing photographs of her mother) and then page through it in the final two panels. While she resents being a 'Golden' like her father, the last panels (figure 23) show that she shares more with her father than she realises:

I once asked her why she'd never entered the "Miss South Africa" pageant,
for surely she'd have won ... She only smiled – like she does – and said:
"... Mmm. You're your father's daughter, you know?"

This last line echoes the first line of the comic, and the meaning of Delilah's mother's statement is twofold. It hints at the possibility that Delilah's father may have once suggested the same thing, but more obviously at the fact that Delilah's mother's beauty touched both father and daughter in the same way. Without realizing it, Delilah affirms the 'Goldenness' she resents so much, showing that the similarities drawn between herself and her father are perhaps not unfounded. As much as her idea of beauty might be socially constructed, her inherent 'Golden' understanding of beauty prevails. She is indeed – and inescapably – her father's daughter.

4.4 Loyalties and betrayal in *A mother always knows...*

Similarly to the two preceding comics, *A mother always knows...* (Appendix D) makes use of two parallel narratives; contrarily the narrated story in *A mother always knows...* does not coincide with the illustrated narrative at any point. They meet, rather, in their sharing of the themes of loyalty and betrayal and a grown-up Delilah's narrated story serves to elucidate the illustrated narrative, rather than the other way around. Again, an older Delilah narrates with the same retrospective tone as she does in *Growing up Golden*, and a younger Delilah, Jane and their parents depict the pain of the aftermath of divorce in the illustrated narrative. The panel that pulls both narratives together is in fact the title panel, simply because both narratives ask the same question – although within different contexts – to which the comic's title is the answer.

That a mother always knows (whether it be that her husband is a cheat, or that her children prefer someone else's cooking to hers) is an accepted wisdom referring to inherent maternal instinct. The phrase is used in the comic to give Delilah and Jane's mother a sense of omnipresence, perhaps even holiness, but in any effect to position her positively against their father.

Through the comic strip a grown-up Delilah recounts an undoubtedly painful story of betrayal – on two levels, which she explains in the second and last panels of the narrative as helping her to make sense of 'it' now that she's felt 'it' for herself (figure 29). However, the 'it' she speaks of in the second panel refers to something entirely different to the 'it' in the last panel. Over the course her narrative reconstruction it appears that she shifts her view, stating initially that looking at her father "it all makes sense to me", but concluding by switching 'father' with 'mother'. The echo of the opening sentence in the final panel, as in *Growing up Golden*, compels the reader to return to the start of the comic to reread the first panel, at which stage the connection between the apparently unrelated narrated and illustrated narratives ought to become clear.

The illustrations of the panels on page one show Delilah, Jane and their father in a car. Jane, sitting in the back seat, asks if Mr Golden will "come inside and see my project?" Mr Golden attempts an apprehensive answer and as Jane pressures him, his face becomes increasingly worried-looking. This culminates in a grave frown and a conceding "Well... Alright then" in the first panel of page two (figure 30). Appropriately, this is juxtaposed with Delilah narrating "The fourth time we met he invited me into their bed", an idea which might induce a similarly grave frown out of Mr Golden.

Over the panels of page two, the illustrations depict the post-divorce hostility and awkwardness between both parents, which literally passes, seemingly unnoticed, over the heads of Jane and Delilah. The fourth panel (figure 31) shows Jane's mother glaring while her father gives her a goodbye hug. Faced with hostility and glares from her mother, Mr Golden reneges on his promise to Jane to look at her project. It isn't

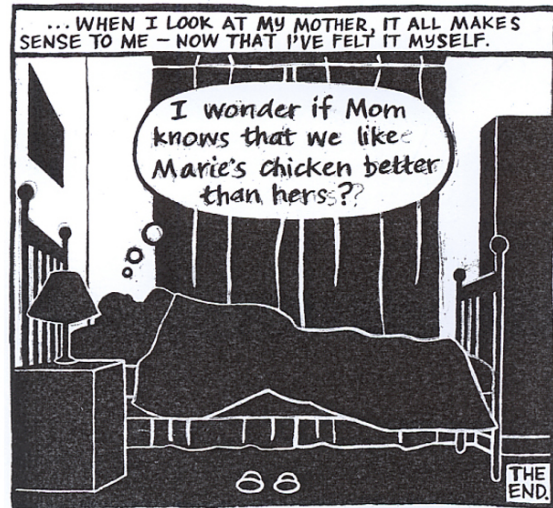
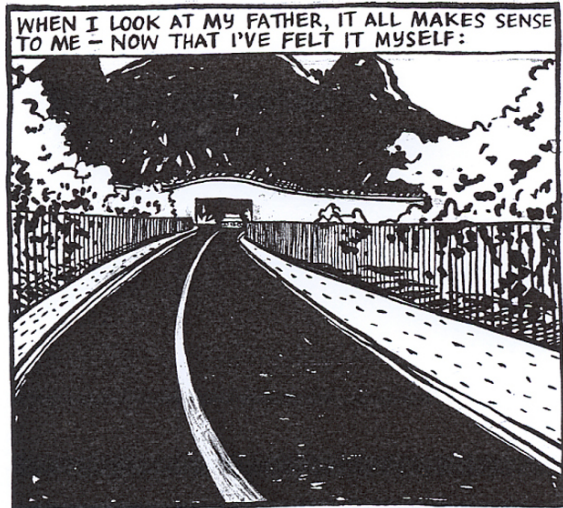


Figure 29: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 1, 4)



Figure 30: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 1)



Figure 31: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 2)

surprising, however; his reluctance expressed in the first panel of the page (figure 30) shows he anticipated the hostile treatment – it probably isn't the first time Jane has invited him into her mother's house, or the first time he's had to refuse. This suggests rather clearly that he is the 'guilty' party in the failed marriage, or perhaps that he might have initiated the divorce. In research conducted by Moxnes (2003:101) it was found that divorced parents who remain friendly towards one another in front of their children make it considerably easier for their children to cope: "While children with parents who were friends or friendly towards each other felt free to continue and strengthen their relationship with both parents, children with parents in conflict felt caught in the middle of the conflict".

In the first panel of page three their mother asks Delilah and Jane whether they'd had a nice supper to which an enthusiastic but anonymous "Yes!" is replied. The garden wall shields Delilah, Jane and their mother from the viewer, while what is apparent is the lonely figure Mr Golden cuts walking back to his car. According to Maccoby (1999:65), divorce can be a hard and lonely process for fathers: they "find themselves alone; they have lost their homes and their daily contact with their children, and must pay to help support a household to which they no longer have access". Once inside, Delilah's mother pursues the topic of supper, asking what they'd eaten. What transpires in the subsequent panels is subtle yet significant. In the third panel (figure 32) we see Delilah respond with a listless "Chicken and vegetables" while Jane adds animatedly, "And chocolate mousse for pudding!" Whereas Jane smiles happily, Delilah seems reluctant to give more detail about their dinner at their father's house.

Their mother looks nonplussed and asks if their father had prepared their dinner, to which Delilah, looking away, is forced to concede "She did." This "she" appears to be the cause of Delilah's concern and her reason for turning away. She is clearly uncomfortable by the turn the conversation has taken, evidenced by her "Um..." (figure 33). While Delilah restrains any enthusiasm and withholds extra details that might suggest they enjoyed their dinner, Jane smiles obliviously. Jane seems completely unaware of her sister's attempt to protect and spare their mother's feelings – which might be hurt by the thought of her daughters enjoying dinner with her ex-husband and another woman – and this appears to make Delilah even more uncomfortable. Herbert

(1996:3) suggests that a child of divorced parents is likely to be equally fond of both parents, regardless of how unreasonably they may have behaved towards one another, and thus “a situation where the child is torn by a conflict of loyalty is a recipe for disaster”. This conflict of loyalty is especially pronounced for children when a new partner or spouse is added to either side of the post-divorce equation, as Smart, Neale and Wade (2001:80) found:

...re-partnering is a complex issue and some children did not feel ‘free’ to like a new partner because they were aware that their other parent was still alone or simply very unhappy. They could feel uncomfortable with one parent’s happiness if it seemed to be based upon the other one’s misery...re-partnering is a major event that prompts children to think about their families in new ways and that gives rise to a variety of strategies of management and negotiation.

Children frequently become messengers between estranged parents in the aftermath of divorce, and this can become something of a burden on the children particularly when “harsh words, blame, accusations and threats” are passed (Moxnes 2003:101). While nothing like this passes between Delilah’s parents in *A mother always knows...* she shows she is aware of her capacity to become the ‘middleman’ in a potentially volatile relationship.

Delilah’s attempt to spare her mother’s feelings and ‘keep the peace’ is what sociologists and social workers might call a ‘strategy of resilience’. According to Jensen and McKee (2003:6) children develop ways and means to cope with the family changes that come with divorce: “the children of divorced parents work at being the children of divorced parents and create sense-making devices”. Similarly, Smart et al (2001:71) assert that when children have good relationships with their parents that they would like to preserve, they often have to “devise strategies for coping with their feelings”.

Having strategies for coping becomes particularly necessary when children are moved between two homes after a divorce and one or both homes are new and unfamiliar. Clearly, divorce raises issues of place for many children. Even those children who have two loving parents whom they see regularly have to manage “the emotional and physical transitions between households which can be demanded of children of divorced parents”. Furthermore, parents often overlook the demands of such transitions. Being

preoccupied with their own loss or even a new partner, parents are often blind to the “resourcefulness and creativity of [their] children in managing childhoods that involve several homes and locations” (Jensen & McKee 2003:9).

By way of announcing that it is time for bed, Delilah’s mother ends the conversation. Jane asks “Already?” and in the first panel of page four says “But Mom – can’t we watch TV tonight? Please?” While Delilah remains quiet, Jane indignantly pushes their mother to let them watch TV, not grasping the sensitivity of the situation as Delilah has. Their mother insists “Not tonight girls. Mummy needs an early night” in the second panel (figure 34) to which Jane tellingly responds “But Mom, you’re always having early nights!” This remark hints at the fact that their mother is taking some strain. According to Jensen and McKee (2003:4) divorce can lead not only to “deterioration in the economic circumstances of childhood” but also many “deprivations in everyday life, with mothers perhaps carrying heavier responsibilities at home and working longer hours”, as was examined earlier in *My mother’s shoes*.

If Delilah and Jane’s mother does not need ‘earlier nights’ because she is depressed or struggling emotionally to deal with the breakdown of her marriage, it could be that she is genuinely exhausted as a result of having difficulty sleeping or having to work harder to afford on a single income the type of life they had enjoyed prior to divorce.

Herbert (1995:15) explains that a “prolonged period of difficulty leading up to the finality of divorce may leave the mother feeling depressed, and mentally and physically drained” while “financial strain may exhaust the last emotional reserves of the mother left alone and for women in this predicament”.

Whatever their mother’s reason for needing an early night, in the panels of page four we see Delilah doing as told and getting into bed. Jane and her mother are absent –possibly Jane might be continuing her fight or their mother might have her hands full putting a younger Jane to bed. Delilah is left to her own devices, for whatever reason, and the last four panels convey an underlying loneliness and forlornness – particularly when read concurrently with the pitiful parallel narrative.

In the last panel of the comic (figure 35), lying awake in bed Delilah wonders to herself whether “...Mom knows that we like Marie’s chicken better than hers?” Marie is the

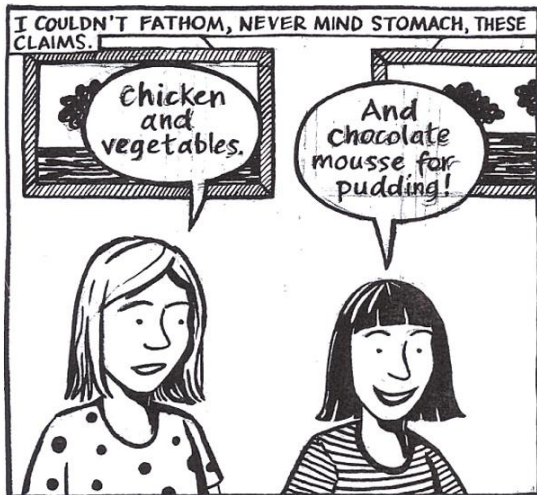


Figure 32: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 3)



Figure 33: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 3)



Figure 34: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 3)

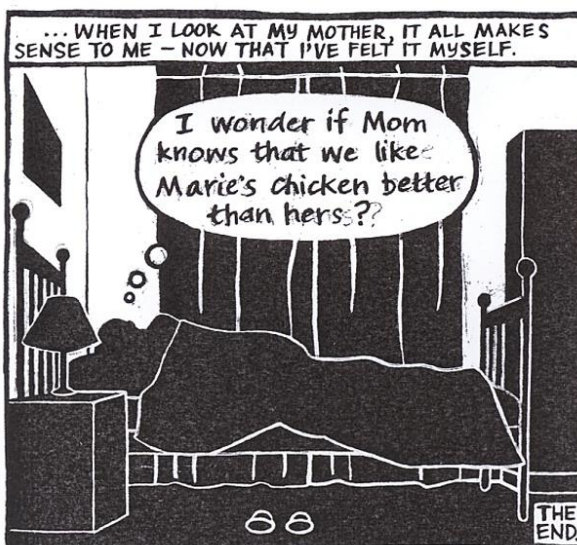


Figure 35: Catherine Clarke, "A mother always knows...", 2006 (Clarke 2006: 4)

‘She’ that Delilah refers to in fifth panel on page three (figure 33), her father’s new partner and the ‘other’ woman in all of their lives. What is implied by her question is not that Delilah dislikes this woman, as one might expect, but rather that part of her, by acknowledging that Marie’s chicken is better than their mother’s, has taken to and accepted this new woman. Acquiring a stepparent – although it is not clear whether Marie is such yet – is a particularly stressful period for children, as Herbert (1996:19) explains:

When a child’s parent remarries – and they usually do – there may be problems of adjustment...Psychological evidence suggests that remarriage inflicts some degree of trauma on all children living in this situation. Researchers have found that children living in households where remarriage has taken place experience greater levels of uncertainty of feelings, insecurity of position and strain than comparison groups.

Children worry that the new person will bring about negative changes in their already altered lives, or that the new partner, particularly stepmothers, will hold true what fairy tales purport about stepparents being wicked (Moxnes 2003:98). However, Moxnes does make it clear that after a while children come to realize the importance of stepparents and the economic and social resources they bring to a household, and in time often become seen as a gain.

It becomes clear in the final panel that what Delilah has been trying to withhold from her mother is the fact that she and Jane had not only had a better supper with Marie, but that they have accepted their father’s new partner. Liking Marie’s chicken better equates with her acceptance and Delilah feels guilty about this – as though she has betrayed her mother. When Delilah wonders if her mother “knows” she is really wondering if their mother has realised her and Jane’s acceptance of Marie. In an effort to keep both parents happy, Delilah feels that she needs to ‘share’ herself fairly between her parents: to accept Marie for her father’s sake, but respect her mother’s loss by remaining loyal to her. It is an awkward position for a young child to be in, and as Jensen and McKee (2003:12) acknowledge, children of reconfigured families “are often positioned between ‘rock and a hard place’”.

Wade and Smart (2003:109) note that the journey children of divorced parents make takes them from a place and time in which they see the redistribution of themselves between both parents as a means of being fair, to a place where, after time has allowed for a coming-to-terms of sorts, children realize they too have needs and desires and expect their parents to recognize this. While the Delilah in the 'illustration' narrative of the comic strip has not yet made this journey, and surely finds herself 'between a rock and a hard place', the older Delilah, narrating, seems to be at the coming-to-terms stage of her journey. By likening her parent's differing positions to her own experience Delilah is attempting to draw sense out of her past.

Perhaps without realizing, the older Delilah as she portrays herself through her narration still finds it necessary to apportion herself fairly between both parents. Her attempt to understand their divorce from both sides shows Delilah still feels torn between each parent and uncomfortable about taking a side, regardless of which parent is – if either – to blame for the broken marriage. It is difficult for children to accept a stepparent under any circumstance and as is evidenced by Lowery (1989:234) in the following statement, when one of the parents marries the partner to an affair that began during the marriage, issues of conflicting loyalties to the biological parent, as well as issues around the authority and commitment the new adult has toward them, are precipitated for the child involved:

When the stepparent was involved with a parent prior to the divorce, these issues are intensified, and an additional issue of morality or integrity is often raised. If the child is too young at the time of the remarriage to be aware of the moral or ethical issues of an extramarital relationship, these issues will likely emerge when the child is older, as the history of the family is very much alive.

The 'it' in the narrated text in the second panel of page one (figure 29) refers to the attraction Delilah feels towards a married man and the feeling, perhaps, of acting against one's best judgements or the best interests of others parties involved. In drawing a connection between these feelings, her father, and herself, she imagines she has felt what her father might have years earlier. The 'it' of the final panel refers to the heartbreak and betrayal Delilah has felt by the married man she describes herself having an affair with. She imagines her parents' divorce, or more fittingly her father, as leaving her mother feeling the same emotions her own experience has left her feeling.

A young Delilah feels guilty about preferring her father's new partner Marie's cooking to her mother's, and Delilah comes to feel she has betrayed her mother. Similarly the older Delilah feels she has again betrayed her mother when, in the fourth panel on the second page (figure 31) she admits, "...I wondered if she could smell a married man on me. What would she think?" Delilah's guilt is transparent and twofold – she knows her mother, having experienced marital betrayal herself, would certainly not approve – but in the same way that she felt she betrayed her mother as a young child by accepting Marie, Delilah feels she is betraying her mother again by assuming Marie's role as the 'other' woman.

Loyalty, betrayal and guilt aside, what the last four panels of the comic do suggest is the sadness, loneliness and abandonment children might feel as the result of divorce. While it was mentioned that divorce can be viewed as positive when it puts to an end a child's miserable home life if his/her parents fought and argued frequently, or because it allows for fresh opportunities, self-development and individualization for both parents and children, the change often leaves children feeling lonely and helpless in the aftermath of divorce – particularly when the children are still young and rely on their parents:

Divorce is a process of individualization of family members. In our culture individualization is seen as positive and understood as producing increased autonomy, independence and freedom – all positive concepts from the point of view of adults and youth. But to children who are dependent on their parents, individualization can mean increased vulnerability and loneliness. (Moxnes 2003:102)

In research conducted by Moxnes (2003) it was found that the consensus among children about the saddest part of a divorce was that it means having to accept the idea of separate, different parents. Being with one parent means being away from the other. Divorce is a process of individualization – not only for the parents, but children too: "Instead of relating to the parents as a set, it becomes, to an increasing degree, the child's responsibility to develop a relationship with each parent and to keep those relationships separate" (Moxnes 2003:98). Divorce opens up new areas of social experience for children and with their parents living apart they are almost invariably aware of the choices available to them about where and how to live. For many children, this process of individualization offers enhanced independence and autonomy: "They

may have to manage emotional transitions between two separate households, get used to travelling long distances to maintain contact with a parent, adapt to living intimately alongside new adults and children, or adapt to not seeing one parent at all” (Smart et al 2001:83).

As was discussed in section 2.3, creating narratives about one’s life is a veritable form of therapy and often a necessary part of coming to terms with painful past experiences. It is important for parents to ‘reclaim themselves’ after divorce; once they have successfully ‘decoupled’ from their previous spouses, they face the task of “establishing a ‘new sense of self’, a ‘new sense of identity’” (Giddens 1991:11). Establishing a new sense of self is achieved by reconfiguring one’s personal narrative into something more appropriate as is often done in psychotherapy or through autobiographical writing, and it is equally important that children, often being as affected by the divorce as their parents, undertake this task too.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the study

Narrative and self-identity are intimately and intrinsically connected, as are language and memory, stories and life, and these relationships have been central to this study. Eakin (1999:100) concludes that self and narrative are “complementary, mutually constituting aspects of a single process of identity formation”. This view affirms narrative as more than just an appropriate form for expressing identity – it is an identity constituent too.

Language is essential to the construction, and for the expression, of identity. Giddens (1991:23) contends that language is the foremost means by which humans are able to distance themselves in time and space, and this elevates human activity “beyond the immediacy of the experience of animals”. Naming is a vital part of identity and essential in terms of representation and classification, as was discussed in 2.1. The process of naming has particular relevance in structuralist theory, which advocates that it is through systems of representation that we are able to locate ourselves within our society, culture and world, and distinguish ourselves as being different to, or the same, as others. Woodward (2002:159) argues that it is more beneficial for us to appreciate dualisms as interrelationships and seek out connections instead of oppositions, so that identity can be understood as fluid and hybrid rather than static and fixed.

Childhood is recognized by Freudian psychoanalytic theory as being the phase of life most responsible for adult traits, qualities, fears and prejudices. Childhood experiences tend to influence the self in assuming a specific structure in adult life, and those relationships with family members developed during childhood can also have particular effect on an individual later in life. While favourable relationships can result in security in adulthood, problems during childhood can lead to emotional uncertainty and unstable identities later in life (Woodward 2002; Rose & Rose 1969). Conflicts within the self are best understood through retelling stories of childhood, and especially of relationships with family members.

This study focused on marital dissolution as a particular childhood condition and examined childhood against the backdrop of divorce. It explored the emotional and identity uncertainties that this phenomenon can cause children, both during childhood and later in life, through selected graphic narratives as discussed in Chapter Four. Divorce and its share of emotional loss can involve a long grieving process, while children's doubts about their self-efficacy are not unlikely, as individual identity is often tied to family identity (Emery 1999a:93). However, despite the disruptions to family life and structure which divorce brings, it has been found that many children conceptualise family in terms of relationships, rather than structures, and that "relations of care and respect assume rather more significance for them than the particular shape and size of their family" (Smart et al 2001:65).

While divorce can be very traumatic for some children, and various factors will determine the degree of this trauma, it is important to remember that many children do not develop any significant social or psychological symptoms during or after the process (Lowey 1989:226). Certainly divorce can be stressful for children, but like adults, they manage to cope with the stress and function effectively. Children may be forced to grow up a little faster in a context of change, and the autonomy and independence that can come with divorce are a necessary part of growing up, as Smart et al (2001:97) contend: "the formation of the self...takes place in a web of relationships and interdependencies, and autonomy can only be achieved through fluctuating degrees of dependency on others at various stages of the life course".

The visual analyses of the selected graphic narratives, or comic strips, in Chapter Four concentrated on the representation of childhood through considered juxtaposition of image and text and the comparison of a past and present self. The use and effect of parallel narratives and the potential for these narratives to reveal identity issues and troubles, as well as ultimately reinforce Delilah's sense of self, was considered.

5.2 Suggestions for further research

This study concentrates broadly on the relationship between identity and narrative, as evidenced in autobiographic graphic narratives that explore childhood, and focuses on divorce as a specific condition of childhood, examining this marital dissolution as reflected in selected comic strips. An area of research, which has not been approached or discussed but which is clearly linked to the content of this study, is those drawings made by children within the capacity of counselling or psychotherapy. It would be useful to study sequences of such drawings as graphic narratives expressing uncertain identities, and decipher and analyse them along with psychoanalytic theory more closely than has been done in this study. Hendriks, Black and Kaplan (1993:2) suggest that not only children, but anyone who fears to tell what they have experienced, “can often only approach the subject indirectly, by means of play, or drawing or modelling in clay or by story-telling. Very often they give messages in code, hoping that someone will understand, but fearing to be direct”. It would also be interesting to investigate the efficacy of drawing during therapy, as a means of interpretation for the therapist, compared to the other methods of communication mentioned by Hendriks et al.

Parental divorce has been addressed in this study as a cause of distress to, and occasionally psychological disorders in children. There exist, however, many reasons for familial and marital dissolution and a range of factors that might cause children similar distress or pain, which could be investigated in a similar way to this study. For example, war was touched on briefly in the discussion on Marjane Satrapi’s Iranian childhood at the time of the Islamic revolution, depicted in her autobiographic graphic novel *Persepolis*. One could examine Satrapi’s comic strips as representations of her youth and personal struggles, set against the backdrop of war and the wider struggle of her country with Islamic fundamentalism. Children, like adults, suffer more intensely when a person or people, rather than a natural catastrophe causes the disaster they witness and war brings with it unique stressors and developmental hindrances for children living within its midst, particularly when their families are displaced, as Hendriks et al (1993:10) point out:

They may have become protectors and providers for their parents, receiving bread and other sustenance in preference to adults, so that the latter become

dependent on their children. Maturation and adaptation are hindered by premature responsibility and role reversal.

The death of a parent is another factor likely to cause children considerable psychological pain and grief as well the stress associated with family restructuring and the acquisition of a stepparent and -siblings. As another area for further research, one could investigate the identity shift of bereaved children as depicted in graphic narratives. Hendriks et al (1993:36) posit that people bereft of someone they love emerge from their mourning process with a new identity: as no longer a daughter but motherless, no longer a son but an orphan, no longer a husband but a widower, and so forth. Karlien de Villier's *Meine Mutter war eine schöne Frau* (2006) is a collection of comic strips examining her experience of her mother's death, both as a child and later in her life as a grown woman, which could be particularly pertinent as a visual narrative to this type of study.

Finally, another subject touched on but not explored in this study and which could make for fascinating future research, is the idea of children as subaltern, or marginal beings, as portrayed in either in comic strips or in children's story/picture books. It was discussed in Chapter Three of this study how children's social identity is thought to mirror that of their parents, which leads to the presumption that children "belong to their parents" (Smart et al 2001:10). According to Smart et al (2001), the 'embryonic' model for understanding the child sees children as little more than simple biological organisms or blank slates. If they have any social characteristics at all, children are said to be weak, unstable, irrational, deficient and capricious in both mind and body. By the definition of 'embryonic persons' children are marginal beings: "As 'blank slates', 'savages' or unfinished products, children are weak-willed, dependent, irrational, unstable incompetent, deficient, asocial, amoral and, ultimately, not fully human" (Smart et al 2001:8). One could examine this phenomenon in any number of graphic narratives; as an example Maurice Sendak's *Where the wild things are* (1967) could be analysed for its portrayal of children and their imagination as vivid, fantastical and wild.

5.3 Reflexive selves in post traditional societies

Narrative's therapeutic potential has been considered in each chapter of this study. It was explained in Chapters Two and Three that as a form of narrative, autobiographical thinking and writing is a valuable means to understanding one's past and coming to terms with conflict, painful experiences or uncertainties of self. Autobiographical thinking necessitates a degree of self-reflexivity, and it is this combination that Giddens (1991) urges individuals accept in contemporary life as a means of coping with change and rebuilding a rewarding sense of identity:

Giddens has argued that, in post-traditional societies, individuals are increasingly obliged to work out their own solutions and moral maps when they face major transitions in their personal lives. He has suggested that this means that individuals are increasingly engaged in a reflexive project of the self in which they write their own biographies rather than following custom or tradition (Smart et al 2001:67).

With regard to the family and marital dissolution, the transformation of traditional family structures requires exploring new social territory and constructing novel forms of relationships, for which both children and adults will need "their own solutions and moral maps" and to "write their own biographies" in order to sustain an integrated sense of self (Smart et al 2001:67). Giddens (1991:244) defines the process of individuals constituting their self-identity by reflexively ordering self-narratives as "the reflexive project of the self":

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience³⁶, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems (Giddens 1991:5).

Giddens (1991:76) offers "keeping a journal" and "working through an autobiography" as compelling methods for sustaining an integrated sense of self. Like any formal narrative, an interpretive self-history, whether thought, written down, or spoken, needs creative input and consistent reworking. Ultimately, what the self becomes – the self-

³⁶ Giddens (1991:243) defines mediated experience as "the involvement of temporally/spatially distant influences with human sensory experience".

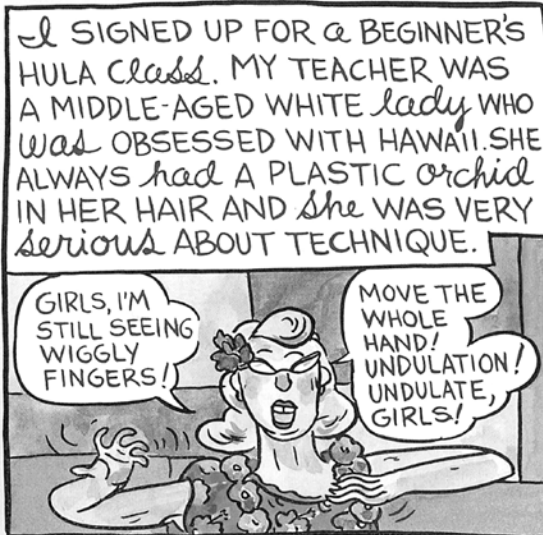
identity achieved – is reliant on the individual’s reflexivity and reconstructive actions, as Giddens (1991:75) concludes: “we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves”.

That an autobiography relates the truth – experiences exactly as they happened – has not been important to this study. Rather, at its core has been the idea that psychotherapy, journaling, autobiography – or any capacity in which one is required to look back on personal experiences and events and draw out some value, some type of resolution or conclusion – invariably involve self-reflexivity and are wholly interpretive.

Autobiography is less about the truth, the exact manner in which events unfolded, and much, much more about the truth as it is *represented* and *reinterpreted*. It is this reconstructing of pasts that is essential to constructing future selves, to our present and future identities as individuals. Autobiographies are really personal fictions presented as historical fact.

In closing, self-reflexivity might be necessary in post-traditional societies, as Giddens posits, but more than this, the self-reflexivity required in reconstructing and reinterpreting the past is essential to the need that we have, as humans, to understand ourselves. As was discussed in Chapter Four, it is in our nature – as children or adults – to develop sense-making devices and create strategies to cope with our feelings. The manner in which this is done, whether through writing, drawing, speaking or any other method of communication, seems irrelevant to the outcome so long as this outcome aids understanding. Steinberg’s (2004:143) comment on the subject of his biographical account of gang-life in Western Cape prisons, explains this fittingly: “For he is doing with his personal history precisely what a nation does with its own; it freezes a moment in time, paints it in bold and gaudy brush strokes, and uses it as a device to explain where it has come from and why it has turned out the way it has”.

APPENDIX A



She MOVED TO OUR STREET FROM A PLACE WHERE NO ONE DID THE HULA. IT WAS AS EXOTIC TO HER AS SHE WAS TO ME.



I INVITED her TO COME AND SEE GIRLS FROM THE ADVANCED hula class DO A SHOW IN A PARKING LOT FOR A SUPERMARKET THAT WAS HAVING A "HAWAIIAN DAYS" celebration.



ACROSS the STREET THERE WAS A DANCE CONTEST AT THE DRIVE-IN. WE TALKED ABOUT ENTERING. WELL, MAINLY I TALKED AND SHE JUST KEPT SAYING NO.



UP UNTIL THEN I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE WAY I DANCED. I HAD NO IDEA I WAS CONSIDERED TO BE SOMETHING OF A SPAZ. THIS NEWS WAS A HEAVY BLOW.



ALL OF A SUDDEN, DANCING GOT HARD. EVEN HULA DANCING FELT WEIRD TO ME. I STILL WENT TO CLASS BUT I STARTED DANCING IN THE BACK ROW. I NOTICED THE MUSIC SOUNDED LESS WONDERFUL AND THAT MY TEACHER LOOKED LESS BEAUTIFUL, AND MORE INSANE.



EVEN MY DANCING RELATIVES STARTED LOOKING CRAZY TO ME, AND I REALIZED IT WAS WEIRD TO HAVE A RECORD PLAYER IN THE KITCHEN.



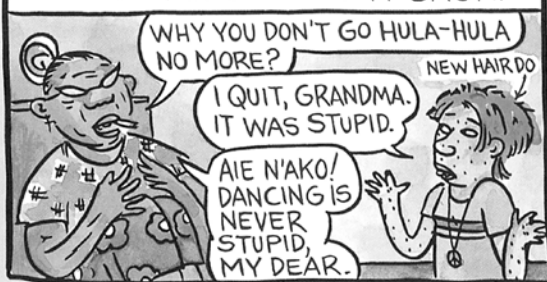
The ONLY PERSON WHO still LOOKED GOOD WHEN DANCING was THE GIRL WHO TOLD me I LOOKED stupid. WELL, HER and MY BABY BROTHER.



BABIES ALWAYS LOOK GOOD WHEN THEY DANCE. THEY HAVE SOME THING THAT IS VERY HARD TO GET BACK ONCE IT IS LOST AND it is always LOST.



I DON'T BLAME that GIRL FOR KNOCKING ME OUT OF my GROOVE. I WAS about TO START JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. It WAS GOING TO HAPPEN ANYWAY. BUT IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE I GOT IT BACK.



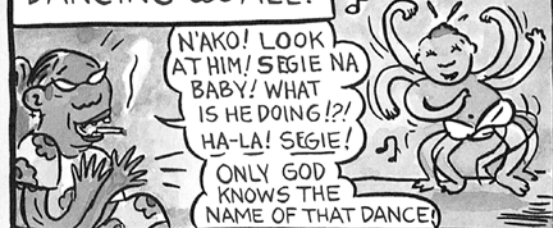
I SPENT TOO LONG EITHER WISHING I COULD DANCE in A WAY THAT ALWAYS LOOKED COOL OR WISHING I WAS COOL ENOUGH TO NOT CARE ABOUT what OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT. MAINLY I DIDN'T DANCE.



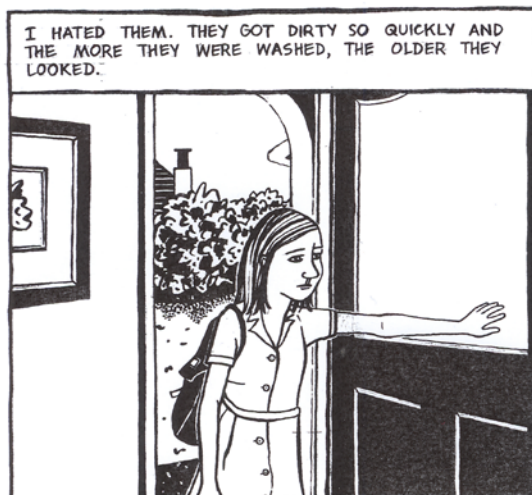
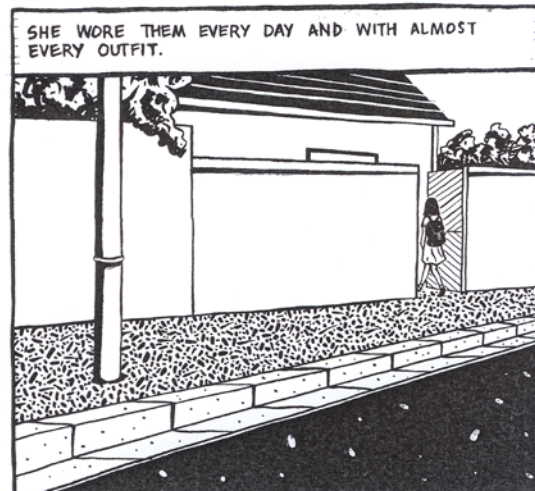
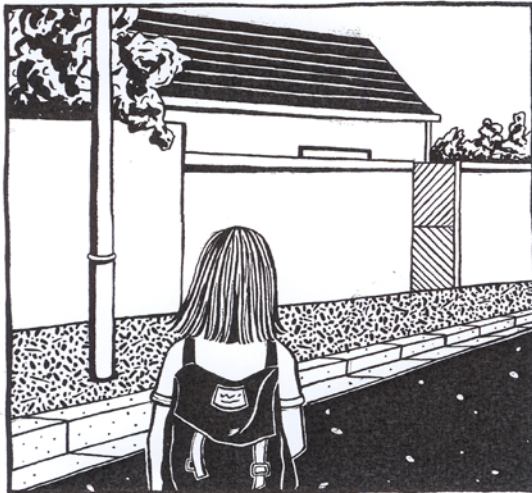
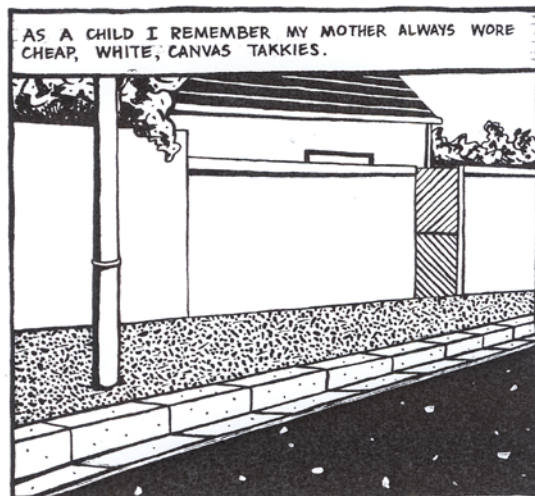
The GROOVE IS SO MYSTERIOUS. WE'RE BORN WITH it AND WE lose IT AND THE WORLD seems TO SPLIT apart BEFORE OUR eyes INTO STUPID AND COOL. WHEN WE GET IT BACK, the WORLD unifies AROUND US, AND BOTH STUPID AND COOL FALL AWAY.



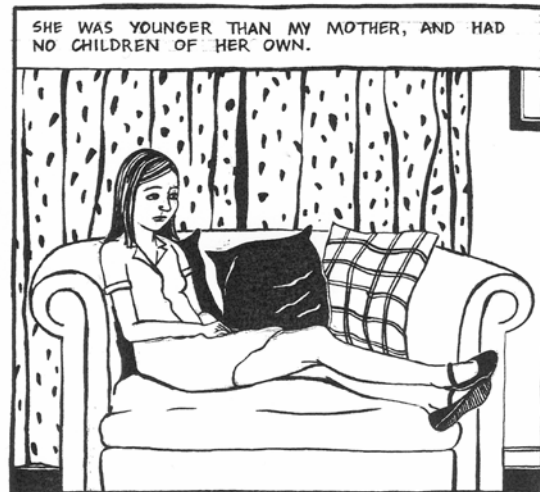
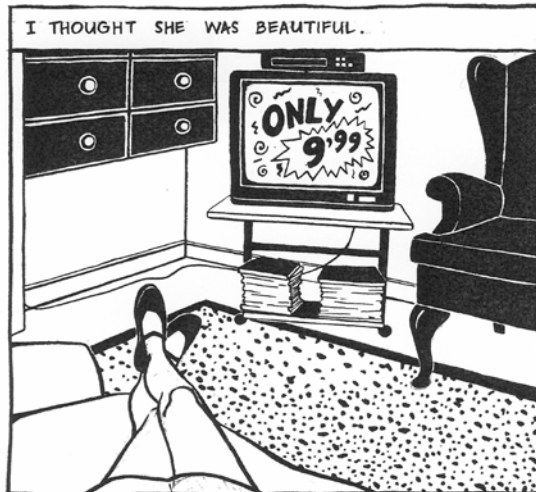
I AM GRATEFUL to THOSE WHO ARE KEEPERS OF THE GROOVE. The BABIES and THE GRANDMAS WHO HANG ON TO IT and HELP us REMEMBER when WE FORGET that ANY KIND OF DANCING is BETTER than NO DANCING at ALL.

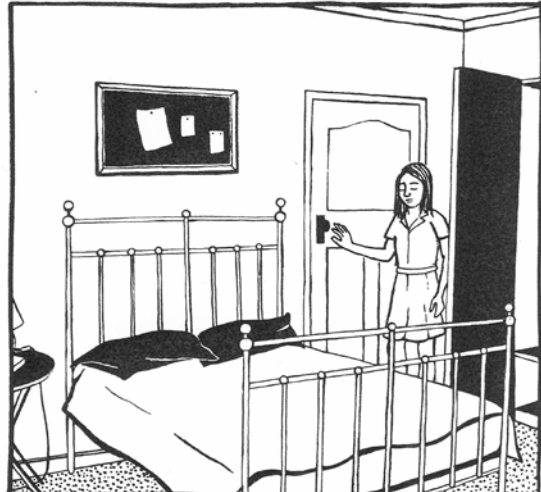


APPENDIX B

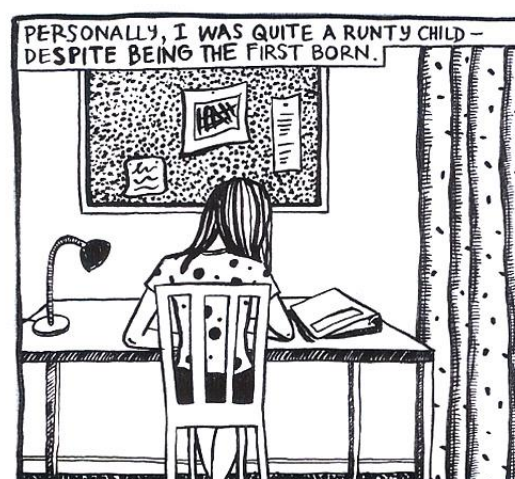
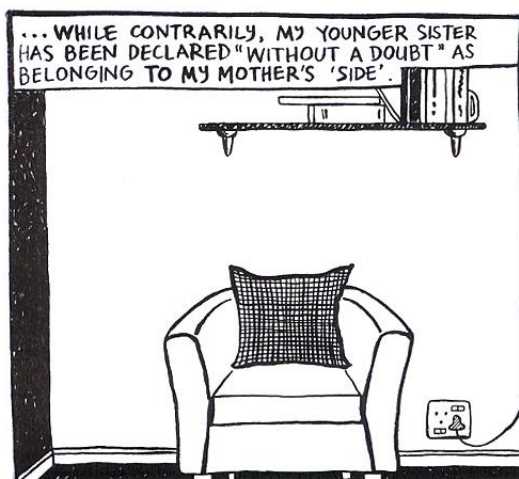
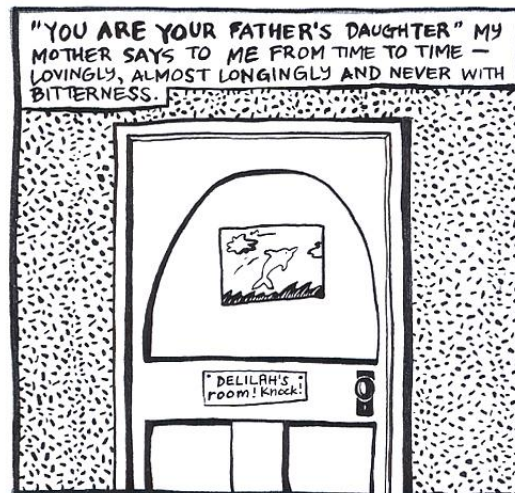
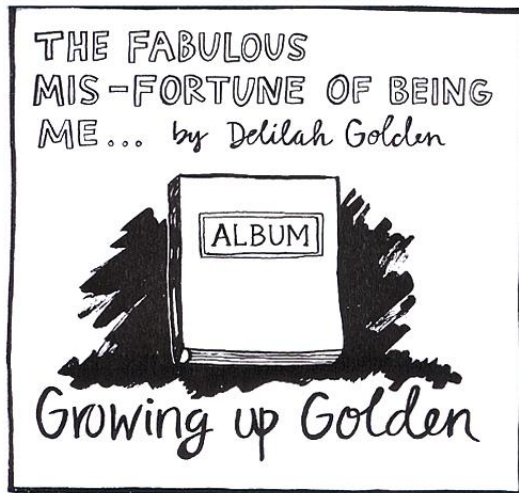


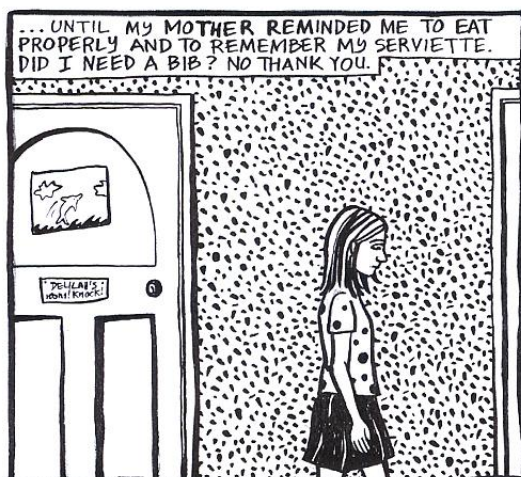
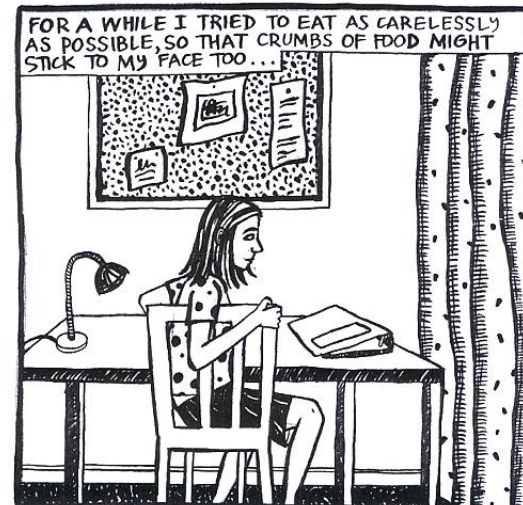
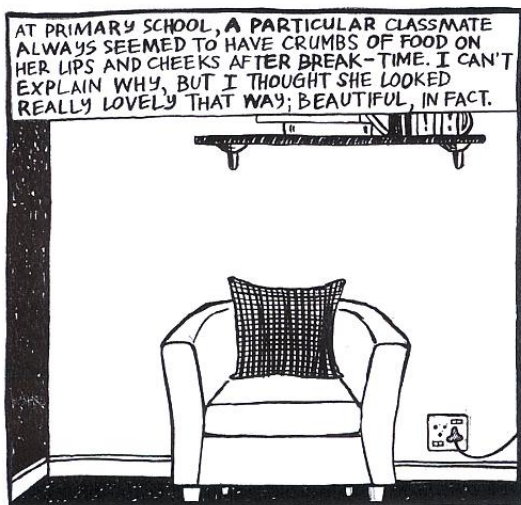


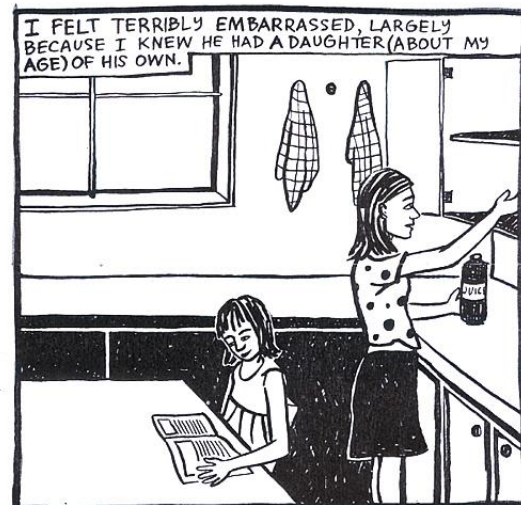
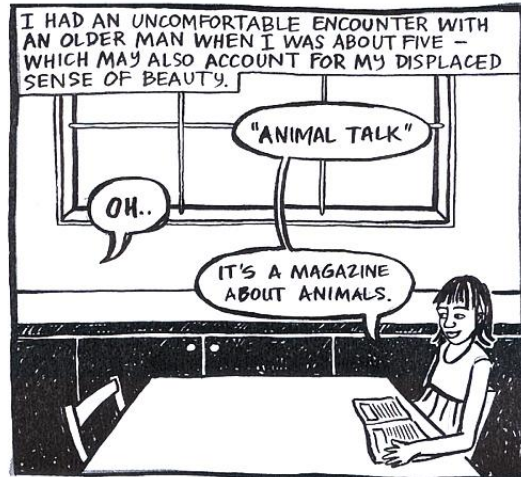


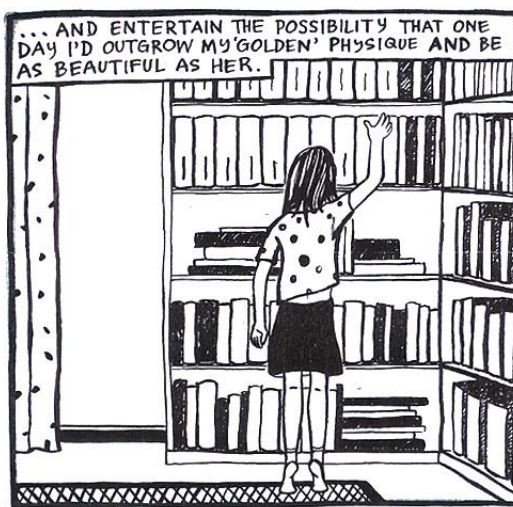


APPENDIX C

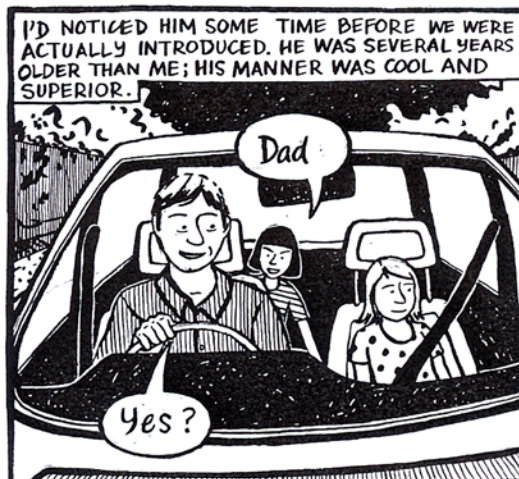
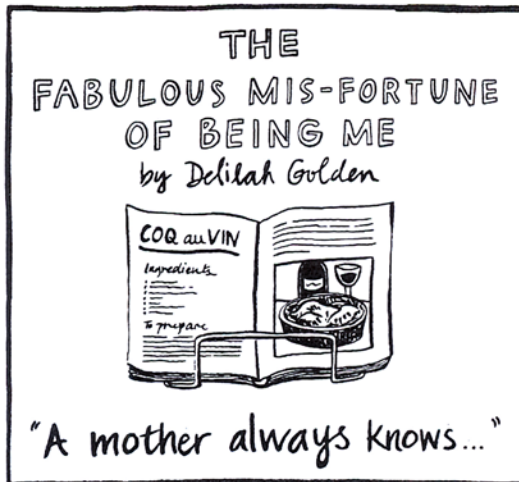




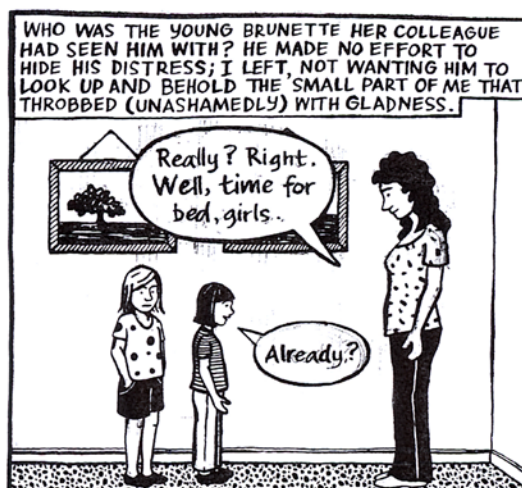
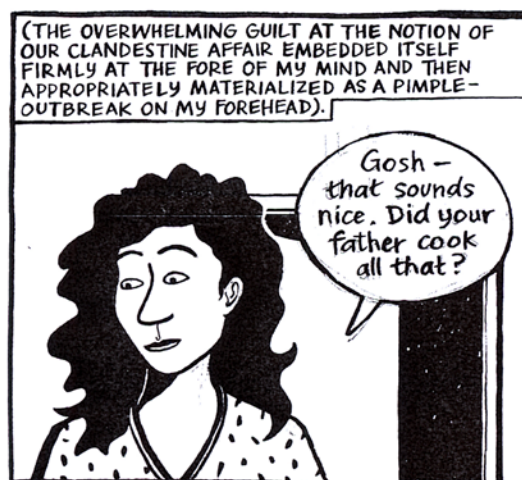
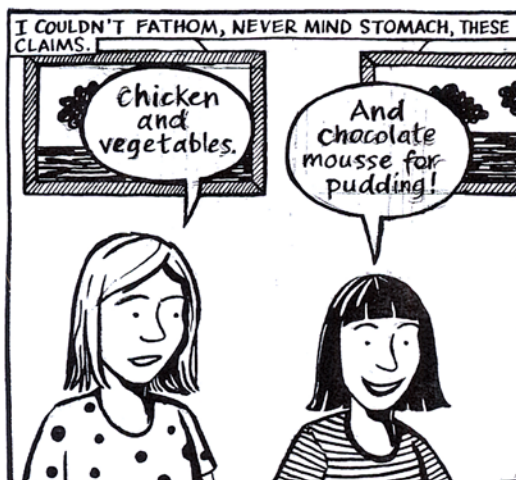
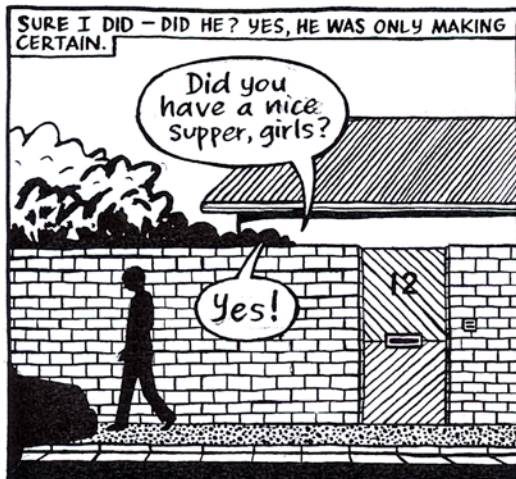


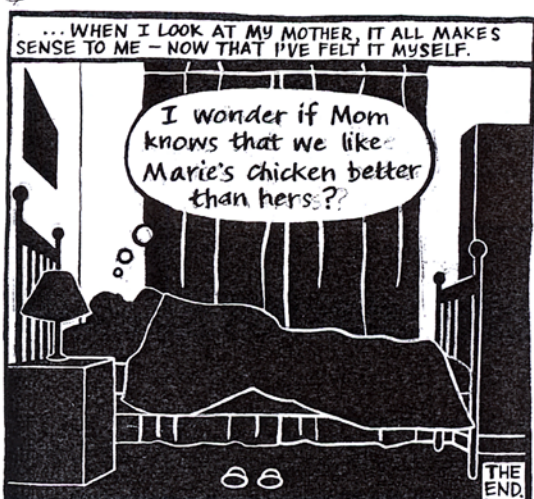
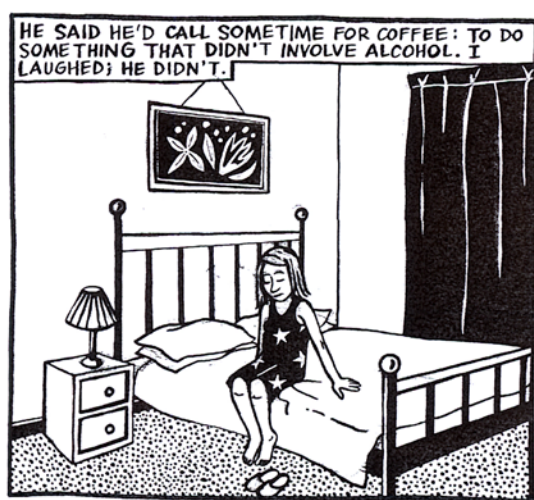
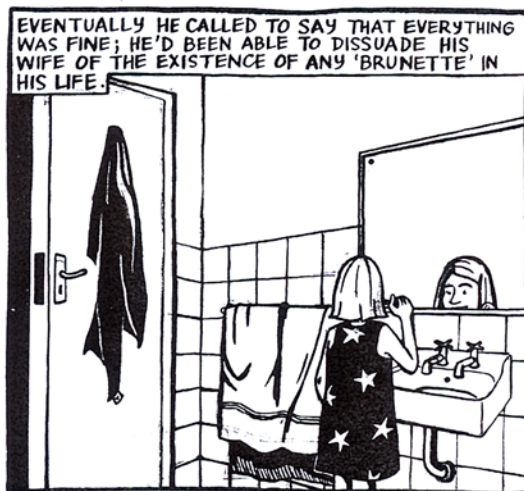


APPENDIX D









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